00020917

Digitized with financial assistance from

H T Parekh FOUNDATION

An Initiative by HDFC WITH YOU, RIGHT THROUGH

on 28 December, 2018

VOLTAIRE'S VISIT TO ENGLAND

VOLTAIRE'S VISIT TO ENGLAND

1726 - 1729

20917
a~

BY ARCHIBALD BALLANTYNE

CHEAPER EDITION

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.
1919

42 S.Ct
Vol / Bal / Vol
20917

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

PREFACE

VOLTAIRE'S visit to England was the most important incident in his life. He tells us so himself. Yet it is the one period of his extraordinary career which is passed over by his numberless biographers in almost complete silence. As Carlyle in his 'Frederick' puts it: 'Mere inanity and darkness visible reign, in all his Biographies, over this period of his life, which was, above all others, worth investigating: seek not to know it; no man has inquired into it, probably no competent man now ever will.' Carlyle's own account of Voltaire in England is full of mistakes. Later researches have done something to fill up this blank page in Voltaire's biography. Notable among these are Gustave Desnoiresterres' 'Voltaire et la Société Française au XVIII^e Siècle;' and Mr. Churton Collins' very short Essay on Voltaire in England.

As this little monograph is mainly biographical, quotation from Voltaire himself and from other writers is used more freely than would be in place in a critical work.

A. B.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	PRELIMINARY	1
II.	VOLTAIRE AND BOLINGBROKE IN FRANCE . . .	20
III.	VOLTAIRE'S FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF ENGLAND .	29
IV.	VOLTAIRE IN RETIREMENT AT WANDSWORTH .	39
V.	VOLTAIRE'S ENGLISH FRIENDSHIPS	61
VI.	VOLTAIRE'S LITERARY WORK IN ENGLAND . .	113
VII.	VOLTAIRE ON ENGLISH LIFE AND LITERATURE .	168
VIII.	VOLTAIRE'S LATER RELATIONS WITH ENGLISHMEN	229
IX.	CONCLUSION	325
	INDEX	333

VOLTAIRE'S VISIT TO ENGLAND

CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARY

THE early life of François Marie Arouet, who chose to call himself Arouet de Voltaire and then simply Voltaire, is a strangely chequered scene of brilliant triumph and of humiliating rebuff. It alternated between gay suppers with princes and public beatings in the streets of Paris. When Voltaire was twenty he was a slave to the dull drudgery of an obscure attorney's office; when he was twenty-six all Paris was flocking to see his first play, and the young poet was the hero of an unparalleled theatrical success. He flitted lightly from château to château, the ever-sprightly friend of high ladies and heroes; and he spent eleven solitary months in the Bastille. He was on equally friendly terms with duchesses and with actresses; he was caned indifferently by a bully and by the lackeys of a lord. In 1725 the new young

Queen of France smiled pleasantly upon him, and Versailles gladly heard his dainty flattery; in 1726 he passed a second time from Court to prison. He was by nature the gayest and brightest and really the kindliest of men; uninjured enemies stabbed him with cruel treachery, and drove him ignominiously from his native country, sick in body and saddened in mind.

Voltaire, born, as his *acte de baptême* shows, in November 1694, was a rich lawyer's second son, and had already been for three years a motherless boy when at the age of ten he entered a famous Jesuit school at Paris. His schoolboy life was a very happy one, and the affectionate friendships which he formed with his Jesuit teachers lasted on long after school days were over. The education given at the College of St. Louis-le-Grand, the most fashionable and influential of Paris schools, was of an exceedingly superficial kind. The pupils read alternately the Latin of Horace and the Latin of Jesuit priests; they were carefully practised in composition and elocution in their own language; but more than this the school hardly professed to offer. The boys spent certain years of their young lives there, and then left, vaguely acquainted with the works of a few of the classical writers, and absolutely ignorant of the history of their own or any other country. Voltaire himself afterwards said that his school education consisted of a certain amount of Latin and a parcel of stupidities.

But indifferent as this so-called education was, it was of the kind to encourage young Arouet in his already clearly developed literary tendencies. The child, who had begun to rhyme in infancy, took his taste for verse-writing with him to his first and only school. His Jesuit teachers were always anxiously watchful for youthful ability, and his school-life, with its many opportunities for precocious literary display, was rich in applause and crowns and prizes. Some fame of his boyish efforts spread even into the wider world and secured for the child a somewhat singular interview. It is odd to remember that not only was the boy Arouet a pupil of the Jesuits, but also that his godfather was an abbé. But the Abbé Châteauneuf was only one of the many pagan Parisian churchmen of his day who assumed ecclesiastical titles for the sake of ecclesiastical revenues. He was an agreeable and accomplished man of the world, full of pleasant anecdote, and a welcome frequenter of the best circles of wit and society. Among his special friends was the now aged Ninon de l'Enclos, and to this exceedingly unique lady the abbé thought it well to present his youthful godson. Ninon's cheerful worship of the goddess Lubricity was long over, for she was eighty-nine years of age when Voltaire first saw her, but the fascinating charm of her exquisitely faultless manners remained with her always. Voltaire's own mother had been one of her friends; and Ninon was so pleased with the child's ways and

sayings that she left him a legacy of two thousand francs, to be spent on books.

Voltaire was seventeen years old when he left his first and only school, and he never had any further formal education. His father intended him for the law; and though from the very first Voltaire looked on such a career with extreme repugnance, he had at least nominally to comply and to attend a course of legal lectures. But he never gave any serious attention to the subject. With the useless antiquarianisms and barren subtleties which distinguished the law-teaching of the time he was very soon entirely disgusted, and everything connected with the career to which it seemed his life was to be sacrificed appeared to him a mere absurdity and nuisance. To Voltaire—who once wrote, "My motto is, 'Straight to the fact' "—it was the most important of all facts that he was living in France in the eighteenth century. But the arbitrary and pedantic methods of legal study insisted on dwelling among the dim procedures and obsolete intricacies of the middle ages, and from all this Voltaire recoiled with contempt and disdain. He turned with fascinated delight to literature and to the charms of witty literary society. Into the brilliantly alluring circles of letters and fashion he made his way with surprising ease; the men of literature and wit and pleasure opened their arms willingly to receive a recruit who shone and sparkled in theatrical green-rooms and at Parisian suppers of the gods. 'Are we

all princes or poets, then?' he gaily asked his friend the Prince de Conti at one of these supreme entertainments; and poets or princes they doubtless all were.

But the heart of Voltaire's father was vexed by all this. Old Arouet himself was not without some touch of literary appreciation, and he had had some quietly superficial intercourse with men of letters. He had even taken his wine with Corneille, only, as he told his son afterwards, to find the great Corneille the greatest bore he had ever met. In his heart, the old lawyer looked on literary men, and their often too careless ways, with a kind of frightened contempt. He knew what misery had been the end of some of the greatest literary names that contributed to the glory of Louis XIV.; he knew how often a keen couplet, or an irresistible but poisoned epigram, had been the signal for exile or the Bastille. The prosperous professional man could not understand the deliberate choice of a career so full of risk and danger; and the idea of living by literature would have seemed facetious to him if the conception had not been morally indefensible. With natural and well-meant persistency he urged his son to avoid the dangerous attractions of literature, and to follow the solid prosperities of the law. But when the choice of a profession was put before the young man, he would accept no other life than that of the man of letters. 'That,' replied his father, 'is the profession of a man who wishes to be useless to

society, to be a burden to his parents, and to die of starvation.'

All remonstrances proved useless. But the father had still one resource left. He gladly seized a happy opportunity which allowed him to remove the young poet altogether from the too fascinating society into which he had entered. The Peace of Utrecht in 1713 renewed the long-interrupted diplomatic relations between France and the Netherlands, and the French ambassador, who was now appointed to the Hague, happened to be the Marquis de Châteauneuf, brother of Voltaire's abbé-godfather. With this Marquis, Voltaire was sent to Holland as page or *attaché*. But it was impossible to put any official and diplomatic gravity into his careless ways and early years. The ambassador had indeed safely brought young Voltaire to the Hague, but it very soon became his heartfelt desire to get him away from it again. There were then living at the Hague one Madame Dunoyer, a Protestant refugee from France, and her young unmarried daughter, Olympe, known to her friends as Pimpette. The mother, a woman of very shifty and tricky character, had a too notorious reputation as the authoress of a periodical of malicious gossip. The clever *attaché* from France easily found his way into his countrywoman's house, and Pimpette irresistibly attracted him back to it. Voltaire was nineteen; Pimpette, of course, was somewhat older. The two young people got on exceedingly well together for a

period of too brief happiness; and then the terrible mother, whose future arrangements did not include the possession of a portionless poet as a son-in-law, interfered in a very crushing manner. She complained to the French ambassador, and that was final. Châteauneuf had no wish to offend the Dutch Protestant authorities by allowing his skittish page to decoy a young Protestant refugee back to France and to Catholicism; and he very particularly feared the chance of finding himself and the affairs of his embassy figuring in the scandalous chronicle of an irrepressibly gossiping and scribbling woman. He insisted on Voltaire's immediate return to France. Vows of eternal constancy passed between Pimpette and her lover, while they devised wild schemes of flight from tyranny, and there were one or two decidedly romantic incidents during the few days which had to pass before Voltaire could leave. But when those few days were over, the romance was over too. In December 1713 Voltaire found himself again in Paris.

Thus the seemingly happy plan of the lawyer Arouet was very speedily ruined. For a time Voltaire dared not show himself at home, for his father's anger was great; but forgiveness came at last, though on strictly rigorous terms. Voltaire had already been forced to attend some lectures on law; he was now compelled to enter on legal drudgery in an insignificant attorney's office, to live in his employer's house, and to endure his slavery as best he could. Not to

acquiesce was impossible. Yet in this unpromising task-house Voltaire was fortunate enough to discover one pleasant solace. In a young fellow-clerk he met with a congenial spirit, and a friendship began which lasted till these two exceedingly odd law-students were both old men. Young Thieriot, full of bright spirit and of lounging laziness, loving poetry and the theatre as Voltaire himself loved them, overflowed with the light gossip of literary talk. But the tantalising pleasure of a friendship which constantly reminded Voltaire of the days when he himself was one in the brilliant throng of life, only made the lawyer's office more than ever unendurable. Happily the punishment did not last long. A young friend interceded with Voltaire's father, and the lucky Voltaire was soon forty miles away from the detested office, a guest in the country seat of the Marquis de Saint-Ange. The Marquis was a fervent admirer of Henry IV. and of Sulli, and had himself been intimate with the men of the great days of Louis XIV. At Saint-Ange, in the society of its aged master, whose wonderful memory was a storehouse of anecdotes on the life he had seen, the men he had known, and the traditions he had heard, Voltaire first began to be fascinated by the story of the times of Henry IV., and to think vaguely and almost unconsciously of a possible French epic. More and more this visit to Saint-Ange encouraged him to follow the road of literature and poetry.

Saint-Ange was not far from Paris, where Voltaire

was not slow to re-appear. He finally rejected the law, and found himself free to do as he pleased. He took his place in the debauched society of the early days of the Regency, and was gladly admitted to the politely pagan suppers of the Temple. The company that he kept made the Court somewhat suspicious of his political orthodoxy. The ambitious Duchess of Maine, a bitter opponent of the Regent Orleans, opened her château and her circle to the young writer; and the Duchess of Maine's poet, already well-known for his epigrammatic way of saying uncomfortably keen things, was regarded with shy suspicion by the rulers at Versailles. The anonymous satires that circulated on all sides against the Regent and his rule were terribly cynical and utterly shameless; the authorship of some of them was, unjustly or not, assigned to Voltaire. The good-humoured Regent was himself personally very indifferent to most that was said of him, but he could not overlook everything. Thus at the age of three-and-twenty Voltaire was exiled from Paris. The originally severe sentence of banishment to remote Tulle was modified, seemingly at the request of old Arouet himself; and the imprudent poet was permitted to withdraw to Sulli-sur-Loire, where his family had relations who might look after his good behaviour. He did not trouble these friends by too prolonged a stay with them, but soon established himself at the Duke of Sulli's château near Orleans. Here Henry IV.'s minister, the great

Sulli, had lived, and here Voltaire once more was in the midst of associations which vividly reminded him of Henry of Navarre. He made his way also to the country houses of Richelieu and of Villars; living a pleasant life of writing, feasting, and love-making, in the very miscellaneous society of leaders of the great world, actresses, poets, and exceedingly free-mannered abbés. This so-called exile lasted till the earliest days of 1717, when the Regent saw Voltaire and pardoned him.

So the Paris life of mingled work and pleasure began again, only to be soon interrupted by a far severer sentence than even banishment to Tulle. Satirical pieces against the frightful Regent could not be suppressed. Among them appeared a short Latin prose satire of a few lines only, in which the Duke of Orleans was charged with the worst of crimes. A spy was found to accuse Voltaire of the authorship of this particular attack. The current story tells how the Regent, walking one day in the garden of the Palais Royal, met Voltaire there and spoke to him. 'M. Arouet,' said Orleans, 'I wager I will let you see something which you have never seen before.' 'What may that be?' asked Voltaire. 'The Bastille.' 'Ah, Monseigneur! I will take the Bastille for seen.' On the next day, a morning in May 1717, Voltaire was arrested in his bedroom and lodged in the Bastille.

For eleven months Voltaire was imprisoned there and was treated with the mildness and consideration

always shown to men of letters whose offences were not of too serious a kind. In April 1718 this seclusion ended, though Voltaire was not yet at liberty to stay in Paris. He went to Châtenay, where his father had a country house and farm, and as the months passed on he frequently received permission to visit Paris for brief periods of necessary business. Before the year was over Paris was again thrown unconditionally open to him.

Voltaire's return to the capital was immediately followed by his first brilliant success in life. His play *Œdipe* was performed and gained an unexampled triumph. Half-a-dozen years of generally bright activity followed this happy beginning. Voltaire was busy with the theatre and with his epic; he was much in the best society which aristocratic France could offer him. He formed a personal friendship with the exiled Bolingbroke, who dazzled him by his literature and philosophy. The Regent settled a pension on the young satirist whom he had so shortly before imprisoned; and Voltaire, mindful of past experience, checked his tongue, ceasing to give offence in quarters which were powerful enough to make him repent it. Royal pensions were added to the Regent's bounty, and the young Queen, Marie Leczinski, offered him kindly looks and words. It is true that there were one or two disturbing incidents in these otherwise prosperous years. The spy whose accusation had thrown Voltaire into the Bastille,

publicly caned him on one of the Paris bridges. It was not possible that all Voltaire's plays should have the success of the first, and some of them had no success at all; while his epic poem, far from finding favour with the King, could only be printed by the aid of the secrecy of a provincial printing-press, and found its way cautiously and stealthily into readers' hands as a book prohibited by the Government. Troubles of this kind, however, could be and were surmounted buoyantly enough by Voltaire. But it seemed as if all his bright prospects were suddenly overclouded and even ruined by the public scandal and disgrace which were the immediate cause of his memorable visit to England.

On a December evening in 1725 Voltaire happened to be at the Opera, and between the acts was amusing himself with conversation which was probably of the literary and critical kind. Among the bystanders was a Chevalier de Rohan, solely distinguished as being the second son of a duke. Rohan broke into the talk with insolent superciliousness, and, sneeringly referring to Voltaire's change of name, began: 'Monsieur de Voltaire, Monsieur Arouet, what *is* your name?' It is not recorded that on this occasion Voltaire thought it worth while to make any reply to the ill-mannered aristocrat; but the two men soon met again, and Rohan a second time attacked Voltaire with impudent inquisitiveness. The second meeting was at the theatre, and in the presence of Voltaire's

friend, the famous tragic actress Mademoiselle Lecouvreur. This time Voltaire was not slow to reply. 'I do not,' said he, 'drag about a great name with me, but I know how to do honour to the name that I bear.' Some of the accounts—which do not all assign the same scene to this unpleasant incident—give a still more cutting and epigrammatic version of Voltaire's words. 'I begin my name,' these reports make him say; 'the Chevalier de Rohan ends his.' Whatever the exact expression was, the words which passed were on the point of ending in blows. The Chevalier raised his cane and Voltaire put his hand to his sword; but Mademoiselle Lecouvreur fainted, and for the moment the quarrel went no further.

A few days after this unseemly event, Voltaire was dining at the Duke of Sulli's. While dinner was still unfinished, he received a message which begged him to go to the door of the house to perform an act of kindness or charity. Voltaire went, and was called to a cab in waiting close at hand. As soon as he had reached the door of the cab, a bully seated inside it seized him, while another applied a stick some half-dozen times to his shoulders. The aristocratic Rohan watched the scene with satisfaction from his own chariot some few paces off, and then cried out to his lackeys, or his hired ruffians: 'That will do; do not strike him on the head; something good may possibly come out of that.' Admiring such

lordly moderation, the bystanders approvingly murmured, '*Ah! le bon seigneur.*'

One can imagine the flaming indignation in which Voltaire returned to Sulli's table, and his scornful anger when Sulli declined to stand by his insulted guest. Rohan was a patrician, and Voltaire was merely an insignificant bourgeois, whom men of birth and fashion liked to have with them for his witty ways, but who was not one of themselves, and who did not come under their social laws. Sulli would not offend the family of the Rohans for the sake of an advocate's son, and Voltaire was equally unsuccessful when he sought redress from the new Regent Bourbon. To high-born officials it seemed a natural and fitting thing that poets should be beaten. The state of affairs would be sad indeed, sneered a bishop, if authors had no shoulders. When a bully and spy had caned Voltaire on the Sèvres bridge the Regent had indifferently said, 'You are a poet and you have had a thrashing; what can be more natural?' Cynical people said that cowardly beatings were the natural accompaniment of cowardly epigrams. The great world, when it listened to the stories of the personal woes of authors, was half scornfully amused, half languidly bored.

Voltaire thus found that though he had been publicly insulted he could hope for no legal redress. Police orders were indeed issued for the arrest of the actual bullies who had committed the assault—an

arrest which was to be managed as quietly as possible and in a way that would cause Rohan no personal annoyance; but there could be little satisfaction for Voltaire in that, and he probably never even knew that such orders had been given. Voltaire quickly saw that if he was to get any satisfaction he must get it for himself, and he consequently decided to run the risk of fighting. He showed himself as usual about Paris and at Court, but no one wasted any pity on him.[1] Voltaire then withdrew from the capital to perfect himself in the use of his weapon. But while Voltaire was daily busy with his fencing-master, the authorities, anxious to prevent further quarrel or scandal, were keeping careful watch on the two enemies. In March 1726 the Parisian lieutenant of police was ordered to be on his guard lest Rohan should again embroil himself with Voltaire, or lest Voltaire should commit some act of madly headstrong folly. Precaution against any sudden emergency went so far that at the end of March the authorities signed a *lettre de cachet*, which sentenced Voltaire to imprisonment in the Bastille, though this decree was not to be personally executed against Voltaire till the emergency should actually arrive. Rumours were soon current in Paris that Voltaire was about to return, and the police had secret information that peace was not about to return with him. On April 16, 1726, Rohan was at the Théâtre

[1] *Journal et Mémoires de Mathieu Marais*, iii. 393.

Français, and Voltaire was there too, ready and eager to meet him. 'Sir,' said Voltaire to him, 'if no matter of interest[1] has made you quite forget the insult of which I have good right to complain, I hope that you will be willing to give me satisfaction for it.' Rohan, who probably knew that he stood in absolutely no danger, accepted, and the two men parted, having nominally arranged to do their best to kill each other at nine o'clock next morning. But the *lettre de cachet* did its work unfailingly. On the same night on which Voltaire had challenged and Rohan accepted, Voltaire was arrested, and at the hour fixed for the duel he was sitting for the second time a prisoner in the Bastille.

Voltaire had no wish to spend a second year in prison; yet it was clear that unless he submitted uncomplainingly to the wrong that had been done him he could live no life of liberty in Paris. He therefore asked permission to leave France altogether. He had been only a few days in the Bastille when he wrote to an official of the Government:—

'The Sieur de Voltaire very humbly points out that he has been assaulted in a cowardly manner by the brave Chevalier de Rohan, assisted by six ruffians, behind whom he had manfully posted himself. The Sieur de Voltaire has since that time constantly sought to repair not his own honour but that of

[1] There was sarcastic point in the use of the word *interest*; for Rohan's ways were not removed from those of usury.

the Chevalier; a task which has proved too difficult. . . .

'He asks permission to dine with the Governor of the Bastille, and to receive visitors. He asks still more pressingly that he may go at once to England. If there is any doubt of the reality of his departure, an *exempt* may be sent with him as far as Calais.'[1]

Voltaire's wishes were fully granted, and his short detention in the Bastille was of a very easy kind. It could hardly have been otherwise, for he was an innocent prisoner suffering for another man's offence. His young friend Thieriot came often to dine with him and brought him English books. Visitors were so numerous that it became necessary to assign moderate limits to their numbers. The confinement lasted for a fortnight, and then, on May 2, Voltaire was liberated. The formal and official terms on which he was released did not banish him from his country, but he was required to depart at once to a distance not less than a hundred and fifty miles from Paris, and he was forbidden to return without express permission. It was quite understood that he would go to England.

[1] Voltaire, *Œuvres*, xxxiii. 156. The references to Voltaire's works are throughout, unless otherwise stated, to Moland's edition in fifty-two volumes, published at Paris, 1877–1885. This is the completest edition that has appeared, but there are many English letters by Voltaire which have never appeared in any collection of his Works. Some of these are printed in the present volume.

Voltaire was to sail from Calais, and he purposely spent some days there, resting and writing to his friends. He did not wish it to be thought that he was being driven into exile. On May 5 he wrote from Calais to the Lieutenant of Police:—

'I am obliged to tell you that I will not go to London till I have re-established my health, which has been considerably impaired by my reasonable vexation. Even if I were in a fit state to go, I would be very careful not to do so in the presence of the *exempt*, in order that I may not give my enemies the opportunity of saying that I am banished from the kingdom. I am permitted and not ordered to go; and I venture to say to you that it would be very unlike the King's justice to banish a man from his native country because he has been the subject of a cowardly assault. If you wish it, I will let you know of my departure whenever I am able to start for England.'

The last sign of Voltaire at Calais is a letter written on May 6, in which he asks a lady of his acquaintance if she has any commands for their common friends—Lord and Lady Bolingbroke. A week later an English newspaper announced to its readers that Voltaire would soon arrive among them:—

'On the 3rd instant M. de Voltaire was released from the Bastile, and conducted as far as Calais, being allowed to go over into England, and forbid to

come within fifty leagues of the Court. 'Tis said he will publish at London a large edition of his famous Poem of the *League*, whereof we have only an imperfect copy.'[1]

[1] *The British Journal*, May 14, 1726.

CHAPTER II

VOLTAIRE AND BOLINGBROKE IN FRANCE

VOLTAIRE was not altogether without knowledge of Englishmen when he arrived for the first time in England. He was acquainted with Bishop Atterbury, who since 1723 had been leading a life of exile in Paris and elsewhere. He knew and corresponded with Lord Stair, the English ambassador to France, whose diplomatic doings are mainly forgotten now, but who is still remembered as a soldier, and above all as English commander in the battle of Dettingen. He had also formed a friendship with a wealthy English merchant, in whose hospitable house he soon found his first English home. But the one Englishman, whom as yet he knew best and admired most, was a far more distinguished man than Stair or Atterbury. It was probably in the London house of Lord Bolingbroke that Voltaire passed his first night on English ground. Among his school-boy friends at the College St. Louis-le-Grand had been young Count d'Argental, whose mother, Madame de Ferriole, shared Bolingbroke's intimate friendship. She appears in his correspondence early in the Queen Anne days, when

Bolingbroke's was a name of power; and when on Queen Anne's death Bolingbroke exchanged his Secretaryship of State for unwelcome banishment to France he renewed his personal friendship with Madame de Ferriole and her circle. It was probably through Voltaire's intimacy with the lady's son that he formed his first acquaintance with Bolingbroke. In some of Voltaire's early letters to intimate friends the name of Bolingbroke is mentioned in quite a familiar way; and, doubtless, Voltaire met him during that first period of exile which Bolingbroke spent in Paris. But that period was not very long; for Bolingbroke, soon disgusted with the weak ways of the Stuart Pretender, broke away from the Stuart faction with an emphatic expression of contempt. For occupation and refreshment he turned to literature, philosophy, and Madame de Villette. He bought a pleasant estate some few miles from Orleans, and there amused himself with building, gardening, smoking, and writing. There he would live, and there very likely, he said, he would die. He pretended to think that he was ambitious no longer, and that the world could offer him nothing for which he would barter his peace and retirement; playing the philosophical hermit at La Source as he afterwards played the philosophical farmer at Dawley. In this mood of idyllic content, which sat so ill on the resentfully scheming soul beneath, he wrote to Swift:—

'I am as busy about my hermitage, which is between the *château* and the *maison bourgeoise*, as if I

was to pass my life in it; and if I could see you now and then, I should be willing enough to do so. I have in my wood the biggest and the clearest spring perhaps in Europe, which forms, before it leaves the park, a more beautiful river than any which flows in Greek or Latin verse. . . . If in a year's time you should find leisure to write to me, send me some mottos for groves, and streams, and fine prospects, and retreat, and contempt of grandeur, etc. I have one for my greenhouse, and one for an alley which leads to my apartment, which are happy enough. The first is, *Hic ver assiduum, atque alienis mensibus æstas.* The other is, *fallentis semita vitæ.* You see I amuse myself *de la bagatelle* as much as you; but here lies the difference; your *bagatelle* leads to something better, as fiddlers flourish carelessly before they play a fine air. But mine begins, proceeds, and ends in *bagatelle.*'[1]

Of the somewhat mock-pastoral gracefulness of La Source, its lady, and its hermit, Pope had at times visions, and Horace helped him to turn them to literary account. Pope, in his irritatingly unnatural way, calling himself 'a poor hermit on the banks of the Thames,' sings to Bolingbroke in his French retreat:—

> What pleasing frenzy steals away my soul?
> Through thy blest shades, La Source, I seem to rove,
> I see thy fountains fall, thy waters roll,
> And breathe the zephyrs that refresh thy grove;
> I hear whatever can delight inspire,
> Villette's soft voice, and St. John's silver lyre.[2]

[1] Swift's *Works*, xvi. 371. July 28, 1721.
[2] Elwin's *Pope*, vii. 403. April 9, 1724.

The silver lyre and the soft voice were both delighted to perform their selectest music in honour of Voltaire. The Marquise de Villette, Bolingbroke's second wife, was herself a Frenchwoman; Bolingbroke was well acquainted with French literature, and in his ways and manner of life was as much French as English. They were both interested in the witty young poet whom they had known in Paris, and the news of the wonderful success of Voltaire's first play was received with pleasure at La Source. Madame de Ferriole offered to secure a copy of *Œdipe* for Bolingbroke, and Bolingbroke wrote to her in reply:—

'I shall be much obliged to you, my dear madame, for the reading which you kindly offer me of M. Arouet's tragedy. Even if I had not heard this play spoken of with praise, I could not fail to be exceedingly impatient to read it. The dramatist who in his very first play ventures to enter the lists with so original a genius as M. Corneille, does an exceedingly daring thing, and yet perhaps such an action is more sensible than is commonly supposed. Doubtless the sentiment which M. Corneille puts into the mouth of the Cid has been applied to M. Arouet. It is a fact that he has not waited for mature years before giving proof of his worth, and his first attempt passes for a masterpiece.' [1]

It seems to have been at the close of 1722 that

[1] Bolingbroke, *Lettres Historiques, Politiques, etc.*, iii. 7. Paris, 1808. The original, dated February 4, 1719, is in French.

Voltaire was for the first time a visitor at La Source. He had been wandering in Holland that year, partly on pleasure, partly to arrange for the printing of his epic; and on his return to France one of his letters at the very close of the year announces that he was about to spend a day at La Source with Bolingbroke. The visit probably lasted a little longer than a short December day. At least, Voltaire had time to read to his two friends his poem on Henry and the League and to be assured of their enthusiastic approval. He was dazzled by the brilliant fascination of Bolingbroke's ways of talking and thinking, and for the moment he partly forgot the difficulties that lay ahead in his own unsettled and precarious career. 'While here,' he wrote from La Source, 'I fancy myself already three hundred miles from Paris; milord Bolingbroke makes me forget *Henry IV.* and *Mariamne*, players and publishers.' Voltaire could not conceal from Thieriot the delight which the visit had caused him :—

'I really must let you know how enchanted I am

The lines of the Cid to which Bolingbroke refers are those in which the Cid (Don Rodrigue) challenges the Count:—

The Count. Jeune présomptueux !
Don Rodrigue. Parle sans t'émouvoir.
Je suis jeune, il est vrai, mais aux âmes bien nées,
La valeur n'attend pas le nombre des années.
The Count. Te mesurer à moi ! Qui t'a rendu si vain,
Toi qu'on n'a jamais vu les armes à la main ?
Don Rodrigue. Mes pareils à deux fois ne se font pas connaître,
Et pour leurs coups d'essai veulent des coups de maître.

by the visit I have made to La Source, the home of milord Bolingbroke and Madame de Villette. 'I found in this illustrious Englishman all the erudition of his own country and all the politeness of ours. I have never heard our language spoken with more force and exactness.

'This man, who has been immersed the whole of his life in pleasures and in business, has yet found means to learn everything and to remember everything. He knows the history of the ancient Egyptians as he knows the history of England. He is as conversant with Virgil as with Milton; he delights in English, French, and Italian poetry, but he delights in them with distinctions, because he is perfectly aware of the different genius of each.

'After giving you such a portrait of milord Bolingbroke, it will, perhaps, seem unbecoming in me if I tell you that he and Madame de Villette were infinitely pleased with my poem. In their enthusiastic approval, they placed it above all the poetical works which have appeared in France. But I know what reductions I must make on such extravagant praise.'[1]

During the two or three years that followed this first visit to La Source, kindly relationships were kept up between Voltaire and Bolingbroke, though they did not personally see much of each other. In 1723, while he was staying at the country seat of a distinguished friend, Voltaire was attacked by smallpox, and Bolingbroke was among those who inquired

[1] *Œuvres*, xxxiii. 84. January 2, 1723.

solicitously about him. On his recovery Voltaire addressed a poetical epistle to his skilful physician, and congratulated himself that he was once more restored to life and to his friends. Bolingbroke occupied a conspicuous place in the list of famous names :—

Et toi, cher Bolingbrok, héros qui d'Apollon
As reçu plus d'une couronne,
Qui réunis en ta personne
L'éloquence de Cicéron,
L'intrépidité de Caton,
L'esprit de Mécénas, l'agrément de Pétrone,
Et la science de Varron.
Bolingbroke, à ma gloire il faut que je publie
Que tes soins, pendant le cours
De ma triste maladie,
Ont daigné marquer mes jours
Par le tendre intérêt que tu prends à ma vie.
Enfin donc je respire, et respire pour toi ;
Je pourrai désormais te parler et t'entendre.

Voltaire was at La Source once more in 1724, and probably this was the last time he saw Bolingbroke in France. Bolingbroke had been pardoned in 1723, and had returned to England; and Voltaire, who saw him as he left Paris for London, distressed himself by imagining that they might perhaps never meet again. But Bolingbroke, whose pardon was of a very incomplete kind, soon returned to France, and in 1724 Voltaire was with him once more. Early in this same year, 1724, Voltaire's name occurs in Bolingbroke's correspondence with Pope. Writing to Pope, Bolingbroke says that his imagination is residing in the head of Voltaire, and he goes on to speak in

terms of high praise of Voltaire's *Mariamne*. 'But I will say no more of it,' adds Bolingbroke, 'since he intends to send it you.'[1] Voltaire himself was vaguely wondering whether he should not dedicate his epic to the English lord who had praised it so unstintingly. Bolingbroke seems to have received some hint of this from their common friend, Madame de Ferriole; and from England, where his estates and property had now been restored to him, he wrote to the lady:—

'Did you receive some time ago a letter which I wrote you, and a second one which I have written to Voltaire? You told me in one of yours that he wished to dedicate his poem to me. So beautiful a work calls for a more important patron. I am ready to do him all the services in my power; the friendship which I have for him and the real merit of his poem will of themselves engage me to do so, and I need no other motive. It is possible that he is changing his intention, it is even possible that he never really had such an intention; but the favour I have to ask you is to sound him very cautiously on the matter and to try to let me know what he really means; and I will quite frankly tell you why. I should be curious to know what he intends to say about me, and this for a reason the very opposite of Cicero's when he wrote to his friend Lucceius: "I fear praises, because I fear ridicule." I could say more to you on this subject, but this is enough for the

[1] Elwin's *Pope*, vii. 398.

moment. Keep my secret and answer at your convenience.' [1]

Madame de Ferriole seems to have replied that Voltaire's talk about the dedication was not to be taken too seriously; and Bolingbroke—who would certainly have liked to be the patron of the poem—does not appear to have wondered much that Voltaire had treated him with at least a shade of duplicity. 'What you tell me,' he wrote again to Madame de Ferriole, 'about Voltaire and his intentions quite agrees with his character and is in every way probable; what he himself tells me is the exact opposite. I will reply to him in some little time, and I will let him have for the whole of his life the satisfaction of believing that with a little of his empty talk he has been able to make a fool of me.' [2]

Whatever this little misunderstanding may have been, it was a mere trifle, which in no way interfered with the friendship between the two. The incident is, however, of especial interest, for it proves that Voltaire, whose epic poem could only circulate in France stealthily, and in spite of the Government, was already looking towards England, and perhaps already thinking to enjoy in a free country the toleration and encouragement which were too frequently refused him in his own.

[1] Bolingbroke's *Lettres, ut supra*, iii. 268. December 5, 1725.
[2] *Id.* iii. 274. December 28, 1725.

CHAPTER III

VOLTAIRE'S FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF ENGLAND

In a very gaily-coloured piece Voltaire has himself recorded the first impressions which England made on him. The artistic exaggerations of light and shade in this pleasant narrative are evident enough; but when Voltaire chooses to tell his own story he must tell it in his own way. He landed at Greenwich, possibly on the fair-day, though the exact date cannot be positively fixed; the weather was the loveliest of an English May-time, and the French exile was enchanted:—

'It was in the middle of spring that I disembarked near London. The sky was cloudless, as in the loveliest days of Southern France; the air was cooled by a gentle west wind, which increased the clear peacefulness of nature and inclined men's minds to joy; such *machines* we men are, and our souls are so dependent on the action of our bodies! I landed near Greenwich, on the banks of the Thames. This beautiful river, which never overflows, and whose banks are adorned with greenness all the year, was covered for the space of six miles with two rows of merchant-vessels. Their sails were all spread in

honour of the King and Queen,[1] who were rowed upon the river in a gilded barge, preceded by boats full of musicians, and followed by a thousand little rowing-boats. Each of these had two oarsmen, and all the rowers were dressed as our pages were in old times, with trunk-hose, and little doublets ornamented with a large silver badge on the shoulder. Everyone of these watermen showed by his looks, his dress, and his plump condition that he lived in freedom and in the midst of plenty.

'Close to the river, on a large greensward which extends for about four miles, I saw an immense number of comely young people caracoling on horseback round a kind of race-course marked off by white posts stuck in the ground at intervals of a mile. There were ladies, too, on horseback, galloping up and down with much gracefulness; but above all young girls on foot, mostly dressed in calicoes. Many of them were exceedingly beautiful, all of them were well-made; there was such neatness, vivacity, and pleased contentedness about them that it made them all look pretty.

'Within the large race-course was enclosed a second and smaller one about five hundred feet long and bounded by a railing. I asked the meaning of all this. I soon discovered that the large course was for horse-races, and the small one for a foot-race. Beside one of the posts which marked the race-course was a horseman holding a large silver-plated vase. Near the railing which ended the shorter course there

[1] Voltaire forgot that during the reign of George I. there was no Queen in England.

were two poles; on the top of one of them a large hat was hung and a woman's chemise floated from the other. Between the two poles stood a stout man with a purse in his hand. The vase was the prize for the horse-race, and the purse for the foot-race; but I was agreeably surprised when I heard that there was to be a race for the girls as well, and that, besides a purse which was to be the winner's prize, the chemise was to be given to the best runner among the girls and the hat to the best runner among the men.

'I was fortunate enough to meet in the crowd some merchants to whom I had letters of introduction. These gentlemen did me the honours of the *fête* with the eagerness and cordiality of men who are enjoying themselves and who are glad that others share their pleasure. They got me a horse; they sent for refreshments; they took the trouble to put me in a place where I could easily see all the incidents in the races, with the river close by, and a view of London in the distance.

'I fancied that I was transported to the Olympian games; but the beauty of the Thames, the crowd of vessels, and the vast size of the city of London soon made me blush for having dared to liken Elis to England. I was told that at the same time a fight of gladiators was in progress in London, and I immediately believed myself to be among the ancient Romans. A courier from Denmark, who had arrived that morning, and who was fortunately returning to Denmark the same evening, was beside me during the races. He seemed to me overpowered with joy and with astonishment; he believed that the entire nation

was always gay, that all the women were sprightly and beautiful, and that the sky of England was always pure and serene. He fancied that the English gave up all their thoughts to pleasure, and that every-day was like the day which he then saw; and he departed without having discovered his mistake. As for myself, I was more enchanted than my Danish friend.'

Such is Voltaire's bright painting of the charming reception which England offered him. In his artistic way he immediately adds a companion and contrasting picture:—

'In the evening I was presented to some ladies of the Court. I could speak of nothing but the bewitching scene from which I had come; I took it for granted that they too had been there, and that they had been among those ladies whom I had seen galloping so charmingly. However, I was a little surprised to see that they had nothing whatever of the vivacity commonly shown by persons who have successfully amused themselves. They were stiff and cold; they took tea and made a great noise with their fans; they either said not a word or cried out all at once in slander of their neighbours. Some of them played at quadrille, others read the gazette. At last one of them, more charitable than the rest, was kind enough to tell me that the *beau monde* did not demean itself by frequenting such gatherings of the people as that which had so charmed me; that all these good-looking persons, in their calico dresses, were maidservants or country girls; that all these resplendent young men,

so well mounted and caracoling round the race-course, were mere students or apprentices on hired horses. I felt really angry with the lady who told me all this. I tried to believe not a word of it, and with provoked vexation I returned to the City to find the merchants and "aldermen" who had treated me with such cordial kindness at my fancied Olympian games.

'In a coffee-house which was dirty, ill-furnished, ill-served, and ill-lighted, I found next day most of these gentlemen who the day before had been so affable and good-humoured. Not one of them recognised me. I ventured to enter upon conversation with some of them, but I could not get a word in reply, or at the very most, a "Yes" or a "No." It seemed that on the previous day I must have done something to offend them all. I examined myself. I tried to remember if I had not expressed a preference for the manufactures of Lyons, or if I had not said that the French cooks were better than the English; that Paris was a more agreeable town than London; that the time passed more pleasantly at Versailles than at St. James's, or anything else equally horrible. But I could find no guilt in myself, and so, in a lively way which seemed to them very extraordinary, I ventured to ask them why they were all so miserable. One of them sulkily replied that the wind was in the East.

'At this moment one of their friends came in and said quite indifferently: "Molly cut her throat this morning; her lover found her dead in her room with a blood-stained razor beside her." This Molly was a young, beautiful, and very rich girl, about to

be married to the very man who had found her dead. These gentlemen, who all were her friends, received the news without wincing. One of them merely asked what had become of the lover. *He has bought the razor*, was the cold reply.

'I was aghast at so strange a death and appalled by these Englishmen's indifference. I could not refrain from asking what could have driven a young lady, seemingly so happy, to tear herself cruelly from life. I got no other answer than that the wind was in the East. I could not at first understand what the East wind had to do with the melancholy mood of these gentlemen and with the death of Molly. I abruptly left the coffee-house and went to the Court, pleasantly presuming, in my natural French way, that a Court was always gay. But gloom and wretchedness possessed everything there, even the very maids of honour themselves. They said in a melancholy manner that the wind was in the East. Then I thought of the Dane I had met the day before. I felt a temptation to laugh at the false idea which he had carried away with him from England; but the influence of the climate had already begun to work upon me, and I was astonished to find that I could not laugh. A famous Court doctor, to whom I mentioned my surprise, told me that I ought not to be astonished yet; that I would see a very different state of things in November and in March, when the people hung themselves by the dozen; that almost everyone was really ill during those two seasons, and that a cloud of melancholy hung over the nation. "For,"

said he, "those are the months when the East wind blows most obstinately. That wind is the ruin of our island. The very animals suffer from it and have a wobegone look. The men who are strong enough to keep their health in this cursed wind at least lose their good-humour. Everyone looks stern and cross and is disposed to form desperate resolutions. It was precisely in an East wind that Charles I. was beheaded and that James II. was dethroned. If you have any favour to ask at Court," he added in my ear, "never go to ask it unless the wind is in the west or south."'[1]

This pleasantly exaggerating banter was not written till Voltaire had spent some considerable time in England, and one is inclined to assign the episode of Molly, the razor, and the dirty coffee-house entirely to Voltaire's imagination. He was himself in no jesting mood during his first days in England. He might be enchanted by the scene at Greenwich and amused or bewildered by the humours of the Court and the town, but he was at heart depressed and melancholy. He had been twice publicly beaten; sneering cynics, when they wished to find a conveniently short synonym for the more cumbrous phrases that expressed 'to give a man a thrashing,' used a new verb, *Voltairiser*. He had been twice in the Bastille, and he was now an exile. He felt that he was as unfortunate as his great hero Henry had ever been, and as he made ready for his journey to

[1] *Œuvres*. xxii. 18-22.

England he expressed his wretchedness in verses of which a few lines have been preserved :—

Je ne dois pas être plus fortuné
Que le Héros célébré sur ma vielle :
Il fut proscrit, persécuté, damné,
Par les dévots et leur douce séquelle :
En Angleterre il trouva du secours,
J'en vais chercher.

The rest of the poem is lost ; but it ended with the lines :—

Je n'ai pas le nez tourné
À être Prophète en mon pays.[1]

In one of the earliest of the letters which he wrote after he had been driven from his own country he returns to the same comparison. 'If,' he writes, 'the character of the hero of my poem is as well sustained as that of my own bad fortune, my poem will certainly succeed better than myself.'[2] And Voltaire's very natural despondency and depression were doubtless increased by the miserable condition of his health. Voltaire was always far too fond of dwelling complainingly on his bodily ailments ; his constant repinings in his countless letters are as tedious and tiresome as a wearisomely repeated formula. The reader is often driven to wish that Emerson's views on this point had also been Voltaire's. 'There is one topic,' writes Emerson, 'peremptorily forbidden to all well-bred, to all rational mortals,

[1] *Œuvres*, i. 75. Dictated by Voltaire to his secretary.
[2] *Id.* xxxiii. 159. To Thieriot ; August 12, 1726.

namely, their distempers. If you have not slept, or if you have slept, or if you have headache, or sciatica, or leprosy, or thunder-stroke, I beseech you by all angels to hold your peace, and not pollute the morning, to which all the housemates bring serene and pleasant thoughts, by corruption and groans.' [1] But Voltaire was always very vocal, and he was the most sensitive of men. He could no more bear physical pain quietly than he could help writhing in anguish if the dullest and dirtiest scribbler attacked him in an offensive sentence. He seems undoubtedly to have been in a sickly state of body during the whole period of his residence in England. In one of his early English letters to Thieriot he says: 'Non vivere, sed valere vita,' and adds:—

'If you want to enter into a course of strict diet, begin soon and keep it long:

> To-morrow I will live, the fool does say.
> To-day's too late, the wise liv'd yesterday.

I am the fool, be the wise and farewell.' [2]

When his sentence of banishment was remitted and he was home in France again, he poured out to his ever confidential friend his confessions on his physical sufferings in his exile:—

'I have gone through many misfortunes; I know by sad experience that illness is the worst of all. To

[1] *The Conduct of Life*: 'Behaviour.'
[2] *Works*, xxxiii. 170. May 27, 1727.

have an attack of fever or small-pox is nothing; but to be overpowered for whole years by languor, to lose relish for everything, to have life enough to wish to enjoy it, but too little strength to be able to do so, to die piece by piece—I have endured all that, and it has been the most cruel of all my trials. If you are in that languid condition, you will find no relief in medicine; I tried it in vain, and found that Nature was the only helper. If I am still alive after all my sufferings and after the vexations which have poisoned the little blood I had left in my miserable body [*le peu de sang qui restait à ma triste machine*] I owe it to exercise and to regimen alone. The air here [Voltaire was in concealment in the neighbourhood of Paris] is worthless; I have been very ill, I was very weak when I arrived. And, besides, I was born of unhealthy parents who died young; and in addition to all that you know what distresses of the mind make my life so cruel a one; but, thanks to regimen and exercise, I am alive, and, for me, that is saying much.'[1]

[1] *Works*, xxxiii. 185. To Thieriot; spring of 1729.

CHAPTER IV

VOLTAIRE IN RETIREMENT AT WANDSWORTH

VOLTAIRE came to London on the evening of the day on which he landed at Greenwich, and doubtless made his way to Bolingbroke's house in Pall Mall. Bolingbroke spent a good deal of his time at his country place at Dawley, near Uxbridge, where he continued his amusing cultivation of rustic and philosophic felicity, and where, as the motto over his door showed, he fancied that he was *satis beatus ruris honoribus*. He called the place a farm, and his hall was painted with rakes and spades and pitchforks. In Pope's letters one sees Bolingbroke at Dawley running after his haymakers' carts, reading letters from Swift among the haycocks, or dining with Pope himself on beans and bacon. But the farmer was a politician at heart, and was far more at home in Pall Mall than in a poultry-yard. He was often in London, and his letters show that he was there in May 1726. If Voltaire is to be taken quite literally when he says that he met ladies of the Court on his very first evening in London, he must be referring to the company he saw that night at Bolingbroke's.

Voltaire had promised the French authorities that

he would go to England, and he had kept his promise. He had not given his word that he would stay in England, and he had no intention of doing so. He was not at all disposed to settle down resignedly in London while Rohan was allowed to triumph openly in Paris. The sickly and emaciated Voltaire was never conspicuous for purely physical courage; but the bitter anger with which he reflected on an ignominious assault impelled him a second time to seek a meeting with Rohan, even in Paris itself, where he could not with safety so much as show his face. Very little is known of this incident in Voltaire's life: regard for his own security compelled him to observe the closest secrecy. But it is certain that not many weeks after his arrival in England he returned to Paris, and passed some time there in hiding and waiting. He saw no friend, not even Thieriot; it was Rohan alone whom he wished and hoped to see. He did not succeed. He wrote to Thieriot that Rohan had felt an instinctive cowardice and had concealed himself, as if he had divined that his enemy was on his track. Voltaire dared not linger long in waiting for him, while any public search for the man he hated would have been ruinous folly. Fear drove him hurriedly to seek some quiet lurking-place outside Paris, and from this retirement, depressed in mind and altogether dark about the prospects of his future, he wrote in melancholy mood to his friend:—

'I am still very uncertain whether I shall retire to London. I know that in England the arts are all honoured and rewarded, and that, though there are differences in rank, the only other difference between men is that of merit. England is a country where thought is noble and free, unrestrained by any slavish fear. If I followed my own inclination, I would take up my abode there, with no other idea than to learn to think. But I do not know whether my small fortune, which has been greatly broken into by so much travelling, my bad health more than ever impaired, and my taste for the most profound retreat will allow me to fling myself into the hubbub of Whitehall and of London. I have excellent introductions for England and I am expected there with much goodwill; but I cannot assure you that I will make the journey. I have only two things in my life to do: one, to risk it with honour as soon as I am able to do so; the other, to end it in some obscure retirement suitable to my way of thinking, to my misfortunes, and to my knowledge of men.

'I willingly abandon my pensions from the King and Queen. My only regret is that I have not been able to procure you a share of them. To me in my solitude it would be a consolation to think that, once in my life, I had been able to be of some service to you. But I am destined to be unfortunate in every way. The pleasure of being useful to one's friends, the greatest pleasure which an honest man can feel, is denied to me. . . . If I still have some friends who mention my name when you are with them, speak

soberly about me to them, and do not let them lose their kind remembrance of me.

'As for yourself, write to me sometimes, and do not be too particular about my letters in reply. Put more trust in my heart than in my letters.

'Adieu, dear Thieriot; love me in spite of my absence and bad fortune.' [1]

In a quiet village, only a few miles distant from the London whose uproar and distractions Voltaire regarded with such apprehension and dread, he soon found the retreat which, for the moment at least, he seriously desired. At Wandsworth, then a country village with its church and windmills and pleasant river, lived one Everard Falkener, an English merchant trading in silk and cloth in the Levant. Falkener rose afterwards to official dignities, becoming English ambassador at Constantinople in 1735, and ten years later being appointed private and confidential secretary to George II.'s son, the Duke of Cumberland. He was with Cumberland in the inglorious Continental campaign of which the battle of Fontenoy was the chief incident, and he accompanied the Duke to Scotland in 1746, when the fight at Culloden crushed the Scotch rebellion. Shortly after-

[1] *Works*, xxxiii. 159. August 12, 1726. This letter shows that Voltaire still hoped for a meeting with Rohan. In April 1727 it was rumoured in Paris that Voltaire was there, and it was easily conjectured for what reason. The rumour was incorrect. In July 1727 Voltaire received official permission to return to France for a strictly limited period of nine months. *Works*, i. 308. But he did not leave England.

wards Falkener was made one of the Postmasters-General, and he held that position till his death in 1758. In his character as Postmaster he was the occasion of one of George Selwyn's small jests. 'It would be odd,' wrote Horace Walpole to George Montagu, 'to conclude a letter from White's without a *bon mot* of George Selwyn's; he came in here [White's] t'other night, and saw James Jeffries playing at piquet with Sir Everard Falkener: "Oh!" says he, "now he is robbing the mail."'[1] Falkener's name is practically forgotten now, and the countless pages of his official dispatches lie unread and unreadable; but he was the most helpful and the most hospitable of all Voltaire's friends in England, and Voltaire all his life regarded him with deep personal affection. It seems that their friendship had begun in Paris, and Falkener, who was a well-educated man of literary and artistic tastes, a good classical scholar, and a collector of antiquities, had pressed Voltaire to be his guest if he should ever visit London. It was probably in August 1726 that Voltaire, having landed for the second time in England, went to Falkener's house at Wandsworth. The overflowing kindness of a rich, amiable, and unassuming man was an exceedingly happy thing for Voltaire. Whenever he pleased he could enjoy in Falkener's home a retirement made luxurious by wealth and generosity, and an ever-ready hospitality which Voltaire never forgot.

[1] Horace Walpole's *Letters*, ii. 315. December 3, 1752.

He afterwards associated Falkener's name with one of his own works, dedicating to him the tragedy *Zaïre*, 'as to my compatriot in literature and my intimate friend. . . . Adieu, my friend; still cultivate letters and philosophy, without forgetting to dispatch your traders to the sea-ports of the Levant. I embrace you with all my heart.' Voltaire has preserved a few lines from a letter to himself, in which Falkener gives a hint of his own easily happy life and character: 'I am here just as when you left me, neither merrier nor sadder, richer nor poorer; enjoying perfect health and in possession of everything that makes life agreeable; without love, without avarice, without ambition, and without envy; and so long as all that lasts I shall boldly call myself a very happy man.'[1] Bolingbroke, writing from Dawley to Lord Bathurst, says: 'Faukener called here the other day, and we drank your health. I take very much to him. He has much and useful knowledge, and is of an admirable temper.'[2]

Sickness of body and distress of mind were sufficient reasons to induce Voltaire to keep away for a time from the whirl and excitement of the London political and literary worlds. But he had another reason for desiring retirement. He came to England with insatiable curiosity, and with the wish to make the best possible use of all the opportunities

[1] For Voltaire's later correspondence with Falkener, see Chap. VIII.
[2] Elwin's *Pope*, viii. 341. October 8, 1730.

that might fall in his way. Yet he knew very little of the English language. It is somewhat vaguely said that he studied English during those weeks of retreat which were partly spent in fencing-practice and other preparations for the desired duel with Rohan. It is certain that Thieriot supplied him with English books during the fortnight of his second imprisonment in the Bastille. But if Voltaire was able to read English he had no command of the language for purposes of conversation. If he had been content to see England through the eyes of others and to satisfy himself with pleasant acquaintances at Court and in general society, his own native language would have served his purpose perfectly well. In 1726 the language of the English Court was as much French as English. George I. spoke no English; the English spoke no German. If he could not do without the theatre, Voltaire could have gone to the French play in London;[1] and at the Rainbow Coffee-house in Marylebone he might have found himself in a numerous society of exiled French writers and thinkers, who there habitually discussed in their own language the political and literary questions of their own country. French was perfectly familiar to his host Falkener; the merchants whom Voltaire met

[1] During Voltaire's stay in England there was talk of establishing a permanent French theatre in London. Voltaire eagerly took up the idea and wrote to Paris about it. The French company came over, but was not well supported and soon returned to France.

on the day of his landing at Greenwich must have conversed with him in his own language. Bolingbroke's French was faultless, and Bolingbroke's French wife knew even less English than Voltaire himself. In a letter to Swift she says that *very cold* and *very warm* are the only English words she understands.[1] Voltaire could have got on pleasantly enough without troubling himself to learn a Teutonic tongue; but he could not have obtained any really sound or serious knowledge of the country he was visiting, and even among its higher intellectual lights there was at least one from whose society ignorance of English would have excluded him. The first interview of Voltaire and Pope was an embarrassment to both of them. Foolish anecdote indeed asserts that Voltaire on this first visit gave proof of his easy command of the English language by talk of such idiomatic indecency that Pope's mother was driven in horror from the room. This is the idlest gossip of malicious absurdity. Voltaire's pronunciation of such English as he knew was almost unintelligible; and Pope, who could not even read French with ease, could not speak a word of it. Thus Voltaire found at the very beginning an excellent reason for spending the earliest period of his stay in England in retirement. His biographer Duvernet says that Voltaire withdrew to a village, and did not return to London till he could express

[1] Swift, *Works*, xvii. 97. February 1, 1727.

himself in English with ease.[1] The village, of course, was Wandsworth, and Duvernet's statement is in perfect harmony with Voltaire's own references to his withdrawal from the town.

In an Italian letter written to an Italian many years later, Voltaire, after regretting his few opportunities for acquainting himself with the Italian language, and remarking that many Italian authors were known to him only by name, added a few sentences on his study of English while he was in England :—

'I know how necessary it is to have a practical acquaintance with a foreign language, and to shut oneself up for at least some months in the country itself in order to gain command over the delicacies and peculiarities of its style. I am sorry to say that I am better skilled in English than in Italian. I was a whole year in London [Voltaire is always vague about dates], and while there I made it a leading consideration to acquaint myself intimately with the too free language of that too free people. The harshness and barbarity of English, however much softened down in good English authors, are certainly not worthy of comparison with the purity and natural elegance of Italian.'[2]

The pronunciation of English seems to have caused

[1] Duvernet, *Vie de Voltaire*, p. 65 (Geneva, 1787). Duvernet applied to Voltaire himself for particulars of his early life, and Thieriot, by Voltaire's desire, gave Duvernet information.

[2] *Works*, xxxvi. 338.

Voltaire a good deal of trouble. It is said that, when he found that the six letters of the word *plague* formed one syllable only, while the four last letters of the same word formed another word of two syllables, he wished that the plague would take one half of the English language, and the ague the other. Long afterwards, in the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, he found fault with both French and English for their want of correspondence between spelling and pronunciation. Who would believe, he there asks, that the English word *handkerchief* is pronounced *ankicher*? Who indeed? In the preface to a little volume which he published in English at the end of 1727, he says that he cannot pronounce the language at all, and that he hardly understands it in conversation. But here he is doubtless exaggerating in a politely deprecating way. There is plenty of evidence to show that after no very long period Voltaire's difficulties with English were fairly overcome, and that he was able to speak and write it with ease. He naturally found the theatre a great assistance. Chetwood, who for twenty years was prompter at Drury Lane, says of Voltaire:—

'This noted author, about twenty years past, resided in London. His acquaintance with the laureate brought him frequently to the theatre, where (he confessed) he improved in the English orthography more in a week than he should otherwise have done by laboured study in a month. I furnished him every evening with the play of the night, which he

took with him into the orchestre (his accustomed seat): in four or five months he not only conversed in elegant English but wrote it with exact propriety.'[1]

Voltaire once found his knowledge of English a practical protection in unpleasant circumstances. The French were unpopular with the English people, and Voltaire, who could never have been taken for an Englishman, in one of his chance rambles in London was insulted by a mob and threatened with injury. Mounting immediately on some stone or step that happened to be near, he harangued the crowd in a speech which began with the words: 'Brave Englishmen, am I not already unhappy enough in not having been born among you?' His eloquent talk had such happy success that the people wished to carry him on their shoulders to his house.[2]

How thoroughly Voltaire succeeded in mastering English for conversational purposes is shown by the fact that till the very last years of his life he took pleasure in speaking it. In 1764 he delighted an English visitor at Ferney by his English talk and recitation of verses of Dryden.[3] He spoke English with Franklin, replying to his niece Madame Denis, who, for her own sake, wished that the conversation

[1] W. R. Chetwood's *General Hist. of the Stage*, 46, *n.* (1749). By the 'laureate' Chetwood does not mean Eusden, who was laureate while Voltaire was in England, but Colley Cibber, who held the post from 1730 to 1757.

[2] Longchamp et Wagnière, *Mémoires sur Voltaire*, i. 23.

[3] *Œuvres*, i. 354.

had been in French: 'I own I am proud of being able to speak the language of a Franklin' He showed perfect familiarity even with the more objectionable peculiarities of a language which was not his own. Pennant, the zoologist, visiting at Ferney in 1765, found that Voltaire was a 'perfect master of our oaths and curses.'[1] When enemies of Voltaire, such as Madame de Genlis, assert that he never had any real proficiency in the use of English, they are only driven by their hostility into making assertions which are contradicted by a hundred proofs.

In English composition as well as English conversation Voltaire soon began to feel his way. His letters written from England in 1726 are chiefly French, but he very soon ventured to write in the language which he was so carefully studying. The poorest and doubtless the earliest specimen of Voltaire's English letters is unfortunately undated; but it must belong to the autumn of 1726. It was addressed to one John Brinsden, a wine merchant, who seems to have been an agent for Bolingbroke:—

'Sir,—j wish you good health, a quick sale of y^{r} burgundy, much latin, and greeke to one of y^{r} children, much Law, much of cooke and littleton, to the other. quiet and joy to mistress brinsden, money to all. when you'll drink y^{r} burgundy with m^{r} furneze, pray tell him j'll never forget his favours.

'But dear john be so kind as to let me know how

[1] Thomas Pennant's *Literary Life*, p. 6 (1793).

does my lady Bolfingbroke, as to my lord j left him so well I d'ont doubt he is so still. but I am very uneasie about my lady. If she might have as much health as she has spirit and witt, Sure she would be the Strongest body in england. Pray dear s^r^ write me Something of her, of my lord, and of you. direct your letter by the penny post at m^r^ Cavalier, Belitery square by the R Exchange. j am sincerely and heartily y^r^ most humble most obedient rambling friend Voltaire.

john Brinsden, esq.
'durham's yard
'by charing cross.' [1]

This is not a very brilliant performance; but a letter to Pope,[2] which cannot have been much later in date, shows very considerable improvement, and, possibly, was touched up and corrected by another hand. Voltaire, however, writing very informally to his most intimate friend, would certainly not trouble himself to obtain any literary revision; and his letters to Thieriot prove that by the spring of 1727 he had obtained an admirable command of the English language. Thieriot, who also was studying English,

[1] The letter was printed in an obscure Birmingham publication, *The Bazar* (sic) *or Literary and Scientific Repository*, in 1824, and was reprinted in *Notes and Queries*, March 28, 1868. The Birmingham print added: 'The subjoined letter is copied literally from the autograph of Voltaire, formerly in the possession of the Rev. Mr. Sim, the editor of Mickle's *Poems*.' This original is now among the MSS. of Alfred Morrison, Esq. See *Report IX. of the Hist. MSS. Commission*, part ii. p. 475.

[2] See p. 73.

was occupied with a work on Mahomet, and he had asked Voltaire to obtain for him an English translation of an Arabic book. Voltaire replied:—

'It was indeed a very hard task for me to find that damned book, which, under the title of *Improvement of Human reason*, is an example of nonsense from one end to the other, and which besides, is a tedious nonsense, and consequently very distasteful to the french nation, that detests madness itself, when madness is languishing and flat. The book is scarce, because it is bad, it being the fate of all wretched books never to be printed again. So I spent almost a fortnight in the search of it, till at last I had the misfortune to find it.

'I hope you will not read throughout, that spiritless nonsense romance, though indeed you deserve to read it, to do penance for the trouble you gave me to inquire after it, for the tiresome perusal I made of some parts of this whimsical, stupid performance, and for your credulity in believing those who gave you so great an idea of so mean a thing.'[1]

In the same year in which this letter was written, Voltaire gave a really astonishing proof of his extraordinary proficiency in English. 'If you,' he once wrote to a friend in later years, 'had been two [*nearly three*] years in England, as I was, I am sure that you would have been so impressed by the energy of the language, that you would have composed something in English.' When Voltaire had been only a year

[1] *Œuvres*, xxxiii. 167. March, 1727.

and a half in England he ventured to publish a book in the language of the country. At the close of 1727 there appeared a little volume which contained two English Essays by Voltaire. These Essays are interesting in many ways; but, after all, what makes them chiefly interesting is the fact that they are the work of a foreigner who, eighteen months before, had hardly possessed the slightest acquaintance with the English language. It is very possible that the Essays are not Voltaire's absolutely unaided work. The Abbé Desfontaines, whose unsupported word is absolutely valueless, says that the book was originally written in French, and that Voltaire only translated it into English with the help of an English friend. A very pointless anecdote seems to indicate that Voltaire had received some assistance from his friend, the poet Young. Spence remarks, on Young's authority:—

'Voltaire, like the French in general, showed the greatest complaisance outwardly, and had the greatest contempt for us inwardly. He consulted Dr. Young about his Essay in English, and begged him to correct any gross faults he might find in it. The Doctor set very honestly to work, marked the passages most liable to censure; and when he went to explain himself about them, Voltaire could not avoid bursting out a-laughing in his face.'[1]

There is clearly something wrong about this

[1] Spence's *Anecdotes*, p. 285. Ed. S. W. Singer, 1858.

meaningless anecdote. Voltaire would not have acted in a way which was contrary to his own interests, and it is absurd to ascribe to him conduct which would have been no less blundering than unmannerly. That Young, or some other English friend, helped Voltaire in the final correction of his work is exceedingly probable. An author, writing in a foreign language with which his acquaintance was very recent, would have been simply foolish if he had taken no precautions against excusable, but possibly annoying or ridiculous, mistakes. But there is no reason to doubt that, essentially, the Essays are Voltaire's own work. He himself speaks quite modestly about them. In the *Advertisement to the Reader* he says:—

'It has the Appearance of too great a Presumption in a Traveller, who hath been but eighteen Months in England, to attempt to write in a Language which he cannot pronounce at all, and which he hardly understands in Conversation. But I have done what we do every day at School, where we write Latin and Greek, tho' surely we pronounce them both very pitifully, and should understand neither of them if they were uttered to us with the right Roman or Greek Pronunciation. I look upon the English language as a learned one, which deserves to be the Object of our Application in France, as the French Tongue is thought a kind of Accomplishment in England.'

And in the second of the Essays he appeals to the reader's kindly forbearance:—

'It is to be hoped he [the reader] will look with some Indulgence on the Diction of this Essay, and pardon the Failings of one who has learned English but this Year, of one who has drawn most of his Observations from Books written in England, and who pays to this Country but part of what he owes to her. A Nurse is not displeased with the stammering Articulations of a Child, who delivers to her with much ado his first undigested Thoughts.'

This was by no means the only English work that occupied Voltaire in England, and he even ventured on composition in English verse. In a *Discourse on Tragedy* which he addressed to Bolingbroke after his return to France, he dwelt upon the strong hold which English had taken upon him:—

'I will own to your lordship that at my return from England, when I had closely studied the English language for two years together, 'twas with some diffidence that I attempted to write a tragedy in French. I had almost accustomed myself to think in English, and I found that the expressions of my own tongue were not now so familiar to me. 'Twas like a river, whose course having been diverted, both time and pains were required to bring it back to its own bed; and 'twas then I found that to attain an art in any perfection a man must devote his whole life to it.' [1]

The melancholy from which Voltaire suffered during his first autumn in England was increased by

[1] From an English translation published in 1731.

personal and family troubles. Soon after his return from his unsuccessful attempt to find Rohan, he received the news of the death of his sister. From Falkener's house he wrote on this occasion to a lady who was an old friend of the Arouet family:—

'I receive together a letter from you of the 10th of September, and one from my brother of the 12th of August. The unknown retreat in which I have lived for two months, and my constant ailments which have hindered me from writing to my Calais correspondent, are the reason why these letters have been so long in reaching me. All that you write me has pierced my heart. What can I say to you about my sister's death, unless that it would have been far better for my family and for me if I had been taken away instead? It is certainly not for me to say to you how little one should make of the so short and difficult transit which is called life; you have clearer views on that than I have, and views which are drawn from purer sources. I know of nothing but the misfortunes of life, but you know their remedies, and the difference between you and me is the difference between the patient and the physician.

'I beg you to be good enough to fill up the cup of kindness which you charitably offer me on this mournful occasion. Either urge my brother to let me know immediately how he is, or let me know yourself. Out of all my father's family, which you have looked upon as your own, he is the only one remaining to you. I must not be counted any longer. It is true I am still alive to respect and befriend you

as I ought; but I am dead for everything else. You were very wrong—allow me to say so with affection and with sorrow—you were very wrong to suspect that I had forgotten you. I have committed many faults in the course of my life. The bitterness and the sufferings which have marked almost all its days have often been of my own causing. I feel how little I am worth; I pity my own weaknesses and I am horrified at my own faults. But God is my witness that I love virtue, and that therefore I shall be tenderly attached to you the whole of my life.

'Adieu; I embrace you—permit me to say so—with all the respect and gratitude which I owe to Mademoiselle Bessières.'[1]

On the following day Voltaire made a flying visit to London, and there wrote another letter, a little, but only a little, lighter in tone. It was addressed to Madame la Présidente de Bernières, who had shown him much kindness at Paris and elsewhere:—

'I only received yesterday your letter of the 3rd of last September. Misfortunes arrive very early and consolations very late. Your remembrance of me is to me a very touching consolation. The profound solitude of my retirement hindered me from receiving it sooner. I have come to London for a moment, and I take the opportunity of having the pleasure to write to you. Then I return at once to my retreat.

'From the bottom of my den, I wish you a happy and quiet life, prosperous circumstances, a small number of friends, good health, and a profound scorn

[1] *Œuvres*, xxxiii. 160. Wandsworth, October 15, 1726. In French.

for what is called vanity. I pardon you for having been at the Opera with the Chevalier de Rohan, on condition that you felt yourself a little confused.

'Enjoy yourself as much as you can in town and in the country. Remember me sometimes when you are with your friends, and let constancy in friendship have a place in the number of your virtues. Perhaps my destiny may one day bring me near you. Let me hope that absence will not have entirely removed me from your thoughts and that I shall find that my misfortunes have inspired your heart with a pity which at the least shall have some resemblance to friendship. Indolence or passion is the sole science of most women, but I think I know you well enough to hope that your friendship may be mine.

'I shall probably return to London very soon and settle there. As yet I have only seen it in passing. If on my arrival I find a letter from you, I believe I shall pass the winter there with pleasure, if the word "pleasure" has any right on the lips of so unhappy a man as I. My sister should have lived and I should have died; the mistake was fate's. I am sadly afflicted by her loss; you know my heart, you know what affection I had for her. I really believed that it would be she who would wear mourning for me. Alas! madame, I am even more dead than she is to the world, and perhaps to you. Remember at least that I have had a share in your life. Forget everything about me except those moments when you told me that you would always be my friend. Count among my misfortunes the occasions when I may perhaps have displeased you, and love me out of

generosity if you can no longer love me out of inclination.

'My address is at Lord Bolingbroke's, London.'[1]

A less painful, but still a vexatious incident of Voltaire's first weeks in London was his loss of money. The royal pensions which he had enjoyed in France ceased with his exile. He brought with him to England a letter of exchange on a London Jew named Acosta. As at first he had no particular need of money, he deferred his application for payment, and unfortunately allowed the date of the letter to expire before he had presented it. When he did at last wait upon Acosta, it was only to learn that he had become a bankrupt the day before. Voltaire himself says that his loss was twenty thousand francs. He had only himself to blame for it, and to take revenge in epigrams against oneself is unsatisfying. The Jew behaved as well as he could. 'He had the generosity,' Voltaire wrote many years afterwards, 'to give me a few guineas which he was able to spare me.' It is vaguely reported that King George heard of the misfortune and sent Voltaire a present of money, which is variously estimated from one hundred to five hundred guineas. But there is no positive proof that George really sent him anything at all. It is not probable that Voltaire had much occasion for money while he stayed in England, but this unlucky loss seems to have pinched him un-

[1] *Œuvres*, xxxiii. 161. October 16, 1726. In French.

comfortably for a time. His life in society brought various little calls upon him which, in the earlier period of his visit, he may sometimes have found a little difficulty in meeting. The essentially barbarous system which compelled a mere dinner-guest to bestow handsome gratuities on the servants of his host, was an exceedingly objectionable tax; and Voltaire, invited to dine a second time at Lord Chesterfield's, is said to have declined, declaring that his lordship's ordinary was too dear.[1] In February 1727 Voltaire wrote to Thieriot that the failure of his pensions, the bankruptcy of Acosta, and the expenses of his illnesses, had brought him to a very unpleasant pass, and he asked his friend to appeal for moneys that were due to him in France. But the melancholy still insisted on showing itself. He would not have Thieriot take much trouble in the matter. 'After all, it is only a *bagatelle*. I have drunk a torrent of bitterness, and that makes me very careless of these little drops.'

[1] John Taylor's *Records of My Life*, i. 330 (1832).

CHAPTER V

VOLTAIRE'S ENGLISH FRIENDSHIPS

VOLTAIRE may be said to have come out of his retirement in the beginning of 1727, when he was formally presented at Court. His acquaintance with George I. had till now been only of the literary kind. When his *Œdipe* was played with such applause in November, 1718, Voltaire, in his usual way making one success yield him another, lavishly distributed his printed play to royal personages. England and France were then on friendlier terms than had for long been usual, and Voltaire sent a copy of his tragedy to George I., addressing to him on the same pleasant occasion an Ode which can only now be read with inextinguishable laughter :—

Toi que la France admire autant que l'Angleterre,
Qui de l'Europe en feu balances les destins ;
Toi qui chéris la paix dans le sein de la guerre,
Et qui n'es armé du tonnerre
Que pour le bonheur des humains ;

Grand roi, des rives de la Seine
J'ose te présenter ces tragiques essais :
Rien ne t'est étranger ; les fils de Melpomène
Partout deviennent tes sujets.

Un véritable roi sait porter sa puissance
Plus loin que ses États renfermés par les mers :
Tu règnes sur l'Anglais par le droit de naissance ;
Par tes vertus, sur l'univers.

Daigne donc de ma muse accepter cet hommage
Parmi tant de tributs plus pompeux et plus grands ;
Ce n'est point au roi, c'est au sage,
C'est au héros que je le rends.

To George the First, the sage and hero ! The heavy Hanoverian, with his dull ways and boorish tastes, becomes the acknowledged sovereign of all the sons of Melpomene, and by his virtues reigns over the universe, though the same virtues were too trifling to enable him so to reign over his own house and family. After so extraordinary a tribute, George could not fail to do something for the young poet who had told him so much that he had never known before. He seems to have made him the present of a watch, and a letter of Voltaire's to Lord Stair, the English ambassador at Paris, has a slight reference to this gift :—

'I cannot resist the desire of sending you some bad verses on the *biribi*.[1] It is not because I think much either of the game or of my poetry, but it gives me another opportunity of paying you my court and

[1] A game of hazard much played at Paris in the early eighteenth century. A large table was divided into numbered spaces, and a bag holding sixty-four numbered balls was connected with the table. Each player in his turn drew a ball from the bag, and if the number on the ball corresponded with that of the square on which he had placed his money, the keeper of the table paid him sixty-four times his stake.

of thanking you for all your kindnesses and those of the King, which I owe only to you. I beg you, milord, to add to all your favours by sending to my father's house the beautiful watch which you showed me. A letter will charm him, and he will be delighted if the presents which the King of England deigns to make me pass through his hands.' [1]

It is quite possible that the royal gratitude added to the watch an acknowledgment of a more substantial kind. Addison, who died in 1719, bequeathed and dedicated his writings to his friend James Craggs, the Secretary of State. Craggs at the close of the same year was enlisting subscribers' names for the forthcoming complete edition of Addison's Works, and he wrote among others to the Earl of Stair at Paris, suggesting that the French Regent, and others connected with the Court of France, might give their names. 'I might add,' writes Craggs, 'that they owe us a favour of this nature for that which his Majesty did to M. de Voltaire.' [2] Evidently the King of all the sons of Melpomene had drawn on the royal generosity, and had added a present of the solid and satisfying kind to the trinket which had little more than an ornamental value. This gives some weight to the commonly current rumour that when Voltaire lost his money in England the royal bounty came to his assistance.

[1] J. M. Graham's *Annals and Correspondence of the 1st and 2nd Earls of Stair*, ii. 128. June 20, 1719.

[2] J. M. Graham's *Stair*, ii. 404. September 24, 1719.

Six or seven years passed by, and Voltaire now saw his benefactor, his sage, his hero, in person. Even the miserably meagre London newspapers of the day thought it worth while to chronicle this appearance of the young French poet at the Court of St. James's:—

'Last week M. Voltaire, the famous French poet, who was banished from France, was introduced to his majesty, who received him very graciously. They say he has received notice from France, not to print his Poems of the League; a prosecution still depending against him, by the Cardinal de Bissy, on account of the praises bestowed in that Book, on Queen Elizabeth's behaviour in matters of Religion, and a great many strokes against the abuse of popery and against persecution in matters of faith.' [1]

But there were two Courts in London, as was more than once the case under the quarrelsome Hanoverian family. Among those who moved in the circle of the Prince and Princess of Wales was the deaf and unassuming Henrietta Hobart, the Mrs. Howard, who numbered Pope and Swift among her friends and correspondents, and whom the English peerage afterwards knew as Countess of Suffolk. The Bolingbrokes, able and willing to give their friend Voltaire introductions wherever he could wish them, did not forget Mrs. Howard, and Lady Bolingbroke wrote to her, asking that the favour of the

[1] *The Daily Journal*, January 27, 1727.

Princess of Wales might be granted to Voltaire. The letter is undated, but its reference to the Princess proves that it was written before the death of George I. As it has never been printed, it may stand literally here as a curious specimen of the way in which an educated and distinguished French lady wrote and spelt her own language. The absolutely necessary full stops have alone been supplied :—

'Madame,—n'esperant pas davoir lhonneur de vous voir, ie vous envoye les comissions dont vous mavez chargée. ie souhaitte quelles soient a vostre gré. sy lecharpe ne vous plaisoit pas ie pourroit m'en deffaire. oseraije a mon tour vous supplier de maquitter dune chose qu'on m'avoit prié de faire. elle ne scauroit estre sy bien placée qu'entre vos mains madame. vous aimez lesprit et le merite et vous este plus capable d'en juger que personne. acordé donc ie vous prie vostre protection au seul poete françois que nous ayons a present et ayez la bonté de presenter a S.A.R. madame la princesse une tragedie quil vient de faire imprimer et dont il a pris la liberté de lui destiner cet exemplaire. le succes que cette piece vient davoir a nostre cour flattera moins lauteur que ne fera la probation de S.A.R. sil est assez heureux pour lobtenir. lamitié que iay pour luy me fait desirer quil puisse avoir aussi la vostre madame. c'est un bien que ie desire pour moy meme et dont ie fais tout le cas quil merite vous honnorant madame tres parfaitement. come ma lettre n'est pas un acte publique ie croy que ie puis la signer en vous assurant que ie suis avec

respect madame vostre tres humble et tres obeissante servante

M. C. Bolingbroke.

'a cramfort ce dimanche.' [1]

To the Duke of Newcastle also Voltaire had been influentially recommended. The French ministers seem to have felt a little natural shame when Voltaire, for no fault of his own, was exiled from his country; and one of them, De Morville, asked Horatio Walpole, Sir Robert Walpole's brother and Stair's successor as English ambassador in Paris, to do what he could for Voltaire's social happiness in England. Walpole accordingly wrote to Newcastle:—

'I hope you will excuse my recommending to you at the earnest instance of Mr. de Morville, Mr. Voltaire a Poet and a very ingenious one who is lately gone for England to print by Subscription an excellent Poem called Henry the 4th. He has been indeed in the Bastile but not upon the account of any state affair; but for a particular quarrell with a private Gentleman, and therefore I hope your Grace will readily give him your favour and protection in promoting the Subscription.' [2]

In June, 1727, the Prince and Princess of Wales became King George II. and Queen Caroline, and

[1] *Brit. Mus. Add. MSS.* 22,627; fol. 75. The Museum Catalogue dates it 1726. In any case it must have been before June 10, 1727, the date of the death of George I. By 'cramfort' Lady Bolingbroke means Cranford in Middlesex. Bolingbroke's house at Dawley was close to Cranford.

[2] *Brit. Mus. Add. MSS.* 32,685; fol. 57. May 29, 1726 (N.S.).

the most familiar figures of the new Court were no strangers to Voltaire. The second of the royal favourites, Mrs. Clayton, better known as Lady Sundon, was his friend. To her Voltaire's graceful flattery must have seemed a pleasant contrast from the brusque and brutal clumsiness of the irascible little tyrant who favoured his wife and his ladies with what he seemed to think was politeness enough for a King. Voltaire's ways were very different. In how airily complimentary a style he fires his light salute of thanks to the lady who had shown him kindness at Court! As soon as he was home in France again he wrote 'To the Honourable Mistriss Clayton, St. james, London':—

'Madam,—'tho I am out of London, the favours your ladiship has honoured me with, are not, nor will ever be out of my memory. I'll remember as long as j live, that the most respectable lady who waits and is a friend, of the most truly great queen in the world, has vouchsafed, to protect me and receive me with kindness while j was at London. I am just now arrived at paris, and j pay my respects to your court, before j see our own. I wish for the honour of Versailles, and for the improvement of virtue and letters we could have here some Ladyes like you. you see my wishes are unbounded: so is the respect and the gratitude j am with

'Madam

'Your most humble obedient servant,

'Voltaire.'[1]

[1] *Brit. Mus. Add. MSS.* 20,105; fol. 48. Paris, April 18, 1729 (N.S.).

Queen Caroline's great friend, Lord Hervey, was Voltaire's friend also, and so too was Hervey's beautiful wife, the matchless Molly Lepell. This best and most beautiful of women was sung in facile verse by countless numbers of those who wrote with ease, and she doubtless moved many hearts that could not solace themselves with the light relief of rhyme. But one friend's admiration gives her a unique position. The only English verses which the most famous Frenchman of the eighteenth century addressed to an English lady were written for Lady Hervey:—

Hervey, would you know the passion
You have kindled in my breast?
Trifling is the inclination
That by words can be express'd.

In my silence see the lover;
True love is by silence known;
In my eyes you'll best discover
All the power of your own.[1]

These are not quite the only English lines which Voltaire ventured to write. In 1773, when he was an old man of eighty, a tragedy named *Zobeide*, mainly based on Voltaire's play *Les Scythes*, was produced at Covent Garden. Its author, Joseph Cradock, sent a copy of his piece to Voltaire, who replied:—

[1] These verses soon appeared in the divorce court. They were pilfered and, the word 'Hervey' being changed to 'Laura,' were addressed by some lover to a City shopkeeper's wife. In the editions of Voltaire they are commonly printed with this wrong name.

'Ferney : October 9, 1773

S^r^

Thanks to y^r^ muse a foreign copper shines
Turn'd in to gold, and coin'd in sterling lines.

You have done too much honour to an old sick man of eighty.

'I am with the most sincere esteem and gratitude, S^r^, y^r^ obed^t^ serv^t^ Voltaire.'[1]

Voltaire's other English rhythmical efforts were not very happy. He dined once with Lord Lyttelton, and at the end of a conversation accompanied by champagne passed judgment on the English people :—

Capricious, proud, the same axe avails
To chop off monarchs' heads or horses' tails.

And in a letter to a friend occur some very astonishing lines, which Voltaire seems to have taken for English blank verse. Dr. Johnson once said that there were ears to which the words 'Lay your knife and your fork across your plate' formed a good blank-verse line. The requisite ten syllables are certainly there. In many passages of his writings Voltaire has a good deal to say of the metre used by Shakespeare and Milton; but it is perhaps as well that he limited his own exercises in an unfamiliar measure to the following exceedingly odd lines :—

[1] A facsimile of this letter forms the frontispiece to Vol. iii. of J. Cradock's *Literary and Miscellaneous Memoirs*. Voltaire probably remembered Roscommon's couplet :—

The weighty bullion of one sterling line,
Drawn thro' French wire, would thro' whole pages shine.

Farewell, *flos Italiæ*, farewell, wise man
Whose sagacity has found the secret
To part from Argaleon[1] without being
Molested by him.[2]

Bolingbroke and Atterbury apart, the first distinguished Englishman with whom Voltaire's personal intimacy can be traced is Pope. Perhaps Pope was the one Englishman whom Voltaire most of all desired to see. There had been some slight interchange of civilities between them while Voltaire was still in France, and each of them, in correspondence with friends, had said kindly and appreciative things of the poems of the other. Bolingbroke had sent Voltaire's epic of *The League* to Pope, and Pope had replied with remarks on the poem and the poet:—

'It is but this week that I have been well enough in my head to read the poem of the League with the attention it deserves. Next to my obligation to M. de Voltaire for writing it, is that I owe to you for sending it. I cannot pretend to judge with any exactness of the beauties of a foreign language which I understand but imperfectly. I can only tell my thoughts in relation to the design and conduct of the poems, or the sentiments . . . As to all the parts of the work which relate to the actions or sentiments of men, or to characters and manners, they are undoubtedly excellent, and the forte of the poem. His characters and sentences are not like Lucan's, too professed or formal and particularised, but full, short, and judicious,

[1] Frederick the Great.

[2] *Œuvres*, xxxix. 488. To Algarotti, September 2, 1758.

and seem naturally to rise from an occasion either of telling what the man was, or what he thought. It seems to me that his judgment of mankind, and his observations of human actions in a lofty and philosophical view, is one of the principal characteristics of the writer, who however is not less a poet for being a man of sense, as Seneca and his nephew were. Do not smile when I add that I esteem him for that honest-principled spirit of true religion which shines through the whole, and from whence, unknown as I am to M. de Voltaire, I conclude him at once a free-thinker and a lover of quiet; no bigot, but yet no heretic; one who honours authority and national sanctions without prejudice to truth or charity; one who has studied controversy less than reason, and the Fathers less than mankind; in a word, one worthy from his rational temper of that share of friendship and intimacy with which you honour him.'[1]

If Bolingbroke, as is likely, let Voltaire know what Pope had said of him, Voltaire could not but have been pleased. Voltaire, writes Bolingbroke to Pope, 'says that he will introduce himself to you, and that the Muses shall answer for him.'[2] Voltaire accordingly did by letter introduce himself to Pope, corresponding with him on *La Ligue*, and sending him his new play *Mariamne*. He also took care to say some agreeable things about Pope in a correspondence which was sure to find its way to Twickenham. Some

[1] Pope to Bolingbroke, April 9, 1724. Elwin's *Pope*, vii. 401
[2] February 18, 1724; *id.* 398.

extracts from a letter by Voltaire were included in one which the exiled Atterbury wrote home to his son-in-law, and Pope duly saw them and was satisfied. No two literary men ever dwelt more profusely on their scorn for the attacks of obscure or spiteful opponents, but no two ever suffered more sensitively when stung even by the pettiest scribbler, and certainly no two first-class writers ever were more delighted listeners to the singing of their own praises.

Voltaire brought with him no stinted admiration for Pope. Very early during his English stay he wrote to a friend in Paris:—

'I intend to send you two or three poems of Mr. Pope, the best poet of England, and at present of all the world. I hope you are acquainted enough with the English tongue, to be sensible of all the charms of his works. For my part, I look upon his poem called the *Essay on Criticism* as superior to the *Art of Poetry* of Horace; and his *Rape of the Lock* is, in my opinion, above the *Lutrin* of Despreaux [Boileau]. I never saw so amiable an imagination, so gentle graces, so great variety, so much wit, and so refined knowledge of the world, as in this little performance.'[1]

Enthusiastic comment of this kind proves that the only letter which has survived to represent Voltaire's correspondence with Pope is not a merely characteristic expression of Voltaire's exaggerated flattery.

[1] Warburton's *Pope* (1751), iv. 38 *n.* October 15, 1726. Warburton says the MS. letter was before him as he wrote. It is also printed in Ruffhead's *Pope*, p. 445.

On an evening in September, 1726, as Pope was returning from Bolingbroke's house at Dawley, his coach-and-six was overturned as it was passing through a stream. Pope was rescued from the coach with some delay and difficulty, but with no severer injury than a hand rather badly cut by broken glass. Voltaire in his retirement at Wandsworth had no news of the accident, and did not hear of it till some two months afterwards, during one of his brief visits to Bolingbroke. From Bolingbroke's he wrote to Pope:—

'Sir,—I hear this moment of your sad adventure: the water you fell into was not Hippocrene's water; otherwise it would have supported you: indeed, I am concerned beyond expression for the danger you have been in, and more for your wounds. Is it possible, that those fingers which have written *The Rape of the Lock*, the *Criticism*, and which have so becomingly dressed Homer in an English coat, should have been so barbarously treated? Let the hand of Dennis or of your poetasters be cut off,—yours is sacred. I hope, sir, you are now perfectly recovered. Really, your accident concerns me as much as all the disasters of a master ought to affect his scholar. I am sincerely, sir, with the admiration which you deserve,

'Your most humble servant,

'Voltaire.

'In my Lord Bolingbroke's House.
'Friday, at noon, November 16, 1726.'[1]

[1] This is the only one of Voltaire's letters to Pope which has survived. Maty, in his *Miscellaneous Works of Lord Chesterfield*,

Conflicting anecdotes claim to tell the story of the first personal interview between Pope and Voltaire. Owen Ruffhead, one of the earliest of Pope's biographers, author of a so-called *Life of Pope*, which appeared in 1769, started a story for which Dr. Johnson, by substantially adopting it, has secured a common currency. Ruffhead's strange story is as follows :—

'Mr. Pope told one of his most intimate friends that the poet Voltaire had got some recommendation to him when he came to England, and that the first time he saw him was at Twickenham, where he kept him to dinner. Mrs. Pope, a most excellent woman, was then alive, and observing that this stranger, who appeared to be entirely emaciated, had no stomach, she expressed her concern for his want of appetite, on which Voltaire gave her so indelicate and brutal an account of the occasion of his disorder, contracted in Italy [*where Voltaire never had been and never was*], that the poor lady was obliged immediately to rise from table. When Mr. Pope related that, his friend asked him how he could forbear ordering his servant John to thrust Voltaire head and shoulders out of his house? He replied that there was more of ignorance

i. 248, says that he once possessed a letter to Pope from Voltaire in which Voltaire asked Pope to translate the following four lines on the English from the *Henriade* :—

Leur Empire n'a point de campagnes désertes,
De leurs nombreux troupeaux leurs plaines sont couvertes ;
Les guérets de leur blé, les mers de leurs vaisseaux ;
Ils sont craints sur la terre, ils sont rois sur les eaux.

in his conduct than a purposed affront; that Voltaire came into England, as other foreigners do, on a prepossession that not only all religion, but all common decency of morals, was lost among us.'[1]

Supplied with this curious theme, following writers mainly repeated it, indulging a pleasant fancifulness by occasionally introducing some slight variations. Johnson, who hated Voltaire, and who had no other difficulty in regard to Rousseau and Voltaire than to settle the degree of infamy between them, says in his *Life of Pope* that Voltaire 'had been entertained by Pope at his table, where he talked with so much grossness, that Mrs. Pope was driven from the room.' A third version is circumstantially certain that the other guests at Pope's dinner-table indignantly called Voltaire 'dog' and 'scoundrel' while a fourth insists that Voltaire's talk was blasphemous as well as disgusting:—

'In the year 1726, Voltaire, having visited England, was introduced to Pope. Being invited to dine with him, he talked at table with such combined indecency and blasphemy, as compelled Mr. Pope's mother, with disgust and horror, to leave the company. Pope disrelished Voltaire from that time; and soon found that the blasphemer of his Creator was equally deficient in honour and integrity as in piety.'[2]

[1] Ruffhead, *Life of Pope*, 213 *n.*
[2] *Addisoniana*, ii. 34.

All this is sufficiently horrible, and happily it is all quite untrue. Voltaire, a young man of the world, fresh from the most brilliantly polished society of France, was sitting at the table of a poet whose verse was his delight and whose company he eagerly desired to share; yet these extraordinary anecdotes ask us to form a conception of a Voltaire who was seemingly possessed of fewer manners than would be considered elementary in a Hottentot. The too unauthoritative Goldsmith, on the other hand, has a very creditable story to tell; but Goldsmith's vague assertion that it is a story which 'M. Voltaire has often told his friends,' cannot mark it as less apocryphal than the other scandalous ones :—

'M. Voltaire has often told his friends, that he never observed in himself such a succession of opposite passions as he experienced upon his first interview with Mr. Pope. When he first entered the room and perceived our poor melancholy English poet, naturally deformed, and wasted as he was with sickness and study, he could not help regarding him with the utmost compassion. But, when Pope began to speak, and to reason upon moral obligations, and dress the most delicate sentiments in the most charming diction, Voltaire's pity began to be changed into admiration, and at last even into envy. It is not uncommon with him to assert that no man ever pleased him so much in serious conversation, nor any whose sentiments mended so much upon recollection.' [1]

[1] Goldsmith, *Works*, iv. 32; ed. Cunningham.

These stories, as circumstantial as they are false, are mercilessly refused any historical credit by one crushing little fact. It is superfluous to argue such anecdotes down by internal evidence. One need not attempt to prove that Voltaire's table manners were not those of a Yahoo, and it is tedious to impress on calmly infatuated biographers that Voltaire could have brought no bodily ailments with him from Italy, seeing that he never was in Italy in his life. There is a simple fact which does all that is required. When Pope and his mother first met Voltaire, neither side could understand a word spoken by the other. Pope, far from speaking French himself or understanding it when spoken by others, could not even manage to read it without some difficulty. In his already quoted letter to Bolingbroke, he confessed that he could not properly appreciate Voltaire's poem of *The League* because of his imperfect acquaintance with the language. Many years after this first interview between Pope and Voltaire, Pope wished to write to Louis Racine. He was obliged to write his letter in English, and to employ one Ramsay, a Scotchman, to translate it into French. As some French readers naturally enough imagined that the French was Pope's own, Voltaire wrote:—'You will please remark that Pope hardly knew French, and that he never wrote a line in that language. This is a fact of which I have been witness myself, and all English men of

letters are aware of it.'[1] And on the same subject he elsewhere writes :—

'What I, as well as all English men of letters, know, is that Pope, with whom I had much intercourse, could hardly read French. He could not speak a syllable of our language, and he never in his life wrote a letter in French, for he was incapable of doing so. If Pope wrote this letter to the son of our Racine, Heaven must, at the close of his life, have suddenly bestowed on him the gift of tongues as a reward for his admirable poem, the *Essay on Man*.'[2]

If Pope could not speak French, just as little could Voltaire at this early period of his stay in England speak English. In the preface to his English Essays he says himself that after he had been a year and a half in England he could not speak the language, and could hardly follow it in conversation. But if there is some exaggeration in this, he at least would not have ventured to make such a statement at the very close of 1727, and that, too, in a work which he knew that Pope himself and Bolingbroke and other English friends would read, if he had been able to take a fluent part in English conversation in the autumn or winter of 1726. The true story of Voltaire's first meeting with Pope is told by Voltaire's earliest biographer, Duvernet :—

'They felt much embarrassment in their first

[1] *Works*, xlv. 412.

[2] *Works*, xxii. 178. In the 22nd of the *Lettres Philosophiques*.

interview. Pope had very great difficulty in expressing himself in French, and Voltaire was entirely unaccustomed to the sibilant sounds of the English language and could not make himself understood. He withdrew to a village, and did not return to London till he could express himself in English with perfect facility.'[1]

It is perfectly possible that, in spite of Voltaire's genuine and even enthusiastic admiration of Pope's literary talents, the two men may not personally have quite suited or pleased each other. Anecdote at least will have it so, but the stories are very vague and untrustworthy. Madame de Genlis is responsible for one circumstantial assertion; but Madame de Genlis's personal statement will fail to secure credence for any otherwise unconfirmed calumny against Voltaire. It seems that during her stay in England in 1791 she formed some friendship with Wilkes, and she asserts that Wilkes spoke much to her of the jealousy and even animosity with which Voltaire regarded Pope. She amusingly adds:—'Everyone knows that he was base enough to denounce Pope as a papist.'[2] If Wilkes had told her that Voltaire had been base enough to denounce Walpole as a Protestant, or to give private information to the Jacobites that George II. was a Hanoverian, Madame de Genlis

[1] Duvernet, *Vie de Voltaire*, p. 65.

[2] *Mémoires inédits de Madame la Comtesse de Genlis*, iii. 294 (Paris and London, 1825).

would have thought it very horrible, but quite in keeping with Voltaire's shocking character. No doubt Wilkes ought to have been an admirable authority on Voltaire's sayings and doings in England, for Madame de Genlis is careful to tell us that Voltaire and Wilkes often dined together in London. She forgets, however, to remind us that Wilkes was not born when Voltaire arrived in England, and that when Voltaire left it Wilkes was an infant in arms, limiting himself to dinner-parties of the most unconventional simplicity and silence, at which his nurse was his sole and inseparable companion.

One serious charge is persistently brought against Voltaire in his connection with Pope. It is alleged that Voltaire treated Pope with political duplicity, and that Pope discovered in the French poet a hypocrite who was really playing the part of spy for the Court. It is, of course, quite true that the Pope and Bolingbroke circle was necessarily in opposition to Walpole. Pope's religion would, in any case, have excluded him from any active share in politics, and, if Bolingbroke was allowed to return to his home and liberty in England, Walpole, really very naturally, closed the House of Lords for ever against him. It is also true that Voltaire, while he was the friend of Pope and Bolingbroke, was not only on a very familiar footing with the circle of courtiers, but had at least some personal intimacy with Walpole himself. Voltaire's friendships and introductions opened every

door, and if his intimacy with Bolingbroke made his way easy among the Tories, he had also brought with him from Paris influential letters which secured his footing among the Whigs. English party politics were nothing to Voltaire; he went indifferently wherever he thought it worth his while to go. He was not the man to overlook the minister who was at the head of affairs, and who was gradually making himself all-powerful and indispensable. Voltaire tells us himself that he was acquainted with 'the two brothers,' that is, Sir Robert Walpole and his brother Horatio. Walpole, ignorant of literature and contemptuously indifferent to it, was not likely to be a very attractive figure to Voltaire; but Voltaire, who never made the literary man's fatal mistake of thinking that literature is everything, always had a keen hankering after public men and public affairs. He was glad to be received on friendly terms in Walpole's house. Lady Walpole wrote to her young son Horace at Eton an account of one visit which the already celebrated Frenchman had paid her, and the incident was the subject of eager discussion by Horace and his young school friends. Forty years later, Horace Walpole himself, no longer young, showed in his correspondence with Voltaire that he had not forgotten the visit he had heard of when a boy:—

'I was not a stranger to your reputation very many years ago, but remember to have then thought you honoured our house by dining with my mother—

though I was at school, and had not the happiness of seeing you: and yet my father was in a situation that might have dazzled eyes older than mine.'[1]

This intimacy of Voltaire's with Walpole and with the Court has led to a charge against him of which perhaps more cannot be said than that, while it is impossible to prove it, it might be decidedly rash to deny it. It is plainly asserted that Voltaire betrayed or at least attempted to betray to the Court secrets which had been confidentially revealed to him in the opposition circles of Bolingbroke and Pope. Bolingbroke, excluded from the House of Lords, was taking an exceedingly active part in the polemical literature of politics. The name, at least, of the *Craftsman*, a paper established in December, 1726, in opposition to Walpole, and numbering Bolingbroke and Pulteney among its contributors, is not even yet quite forgotten. Bolingbroke secured for himself a less formally fixed opportunity for attacks against the minister by commencing in January, 1727, the publication of occasional letters under the signature of the *Occasional Writer*. These letters—of which only four appeared—are full of satire and irony against Walpole. The third is especially amusing in its ironical praise of his statesmanship. The authorship was of course concealed, and the Government would have liked to know with certainty the name of the

[1] H. Walpole to Voltaire, June 21, 1768. Walpole, *Letters*, v. 109. Ed. Cunningham.

writer who had produced a piece so far removed from the manner of the ordinary political hack. Walpole, doubtless, recognised Bolingbroke's hand, though he had no absolute proof of it; letters and pamphlets of the period show that Bolingbroke and the *Occasional Writer* were commonly assumed to be the same. It is the charge against Voltaire that he attempted to extract from Pope an admission of the Occasional Writer's identity, while Pope, immediately divining Voltaire's treacherous intentions, is said to have given him information which was purposely false. Voltaire, taking the false news for true, betrayed his secret information to the Court. Johnson states the case quite plainly:—'Pope discovered, by a trick, that he [Voltaire] was a spy for the Court, and never considered him as a man worthy of confidence.' The original story rests on the authority of Ruffhead, and one does not like the security. Ruffhead may possibly have had his information from Warburton; but, as he cites no evidence, the candid inquirer can only say that the story exists, and has been neither proved nor disproved. This is Ruffhead's minutely circumstantial narrative:—

'Mr. Pope said . . . . that Voltaire was a spy for the Court while he staid in England; of which he gave his friend the following instance. When the first *Occasional Letter* to Sir Robert Walpole came out (by which circumstance the reader may collect the time of Voltaire's voyage hither) he made Mr.

Pope a visit at Twickenham; and walking with him in his garden he said: Pope, this *Occasional Letter* alarms the Court extremely. It is finely written. As you converse much with the best pens conversant in public business, you must know the author. You may safely tell this secret to a stranger, who has no concerns with your national quarrels. Mr. Pope said, he perfectly understood him, as he knew his character; and, to make a trial, which hardly needed any, he replied:—Mr. Voltaire, you are a man of honour; I may safely, I know, trust an important secret to your breast. I myself wrote it. Voltaire, after launching out into high encomiums on the performance, was, he perceived, impatient to get away; and next day he [Pope] heard that all the Court reported that he was the author. This infamy of the man gave Mr. Pope and his friends much occasion of mirth, and much light in the manner how he ought to be treated. How he was treated ever after by Mr. Pope himself appears from what passed on Voltaire's coming to take leave of Mr. Pope, on his return to France. After the common compliments had passed, Mr. Pope told his friend that Voltaire took his leave of him in these words:—And now I am come to bid farewell to a man who has never treated me seriously from the first hour of my acquaintance with him to this moment. Mr. Pope said the observation was just, and the reason of his conduct has been given above.'[1]

It has been, perhaps, rather rashly assumed that a reference to this subject in one of Bolingbroke's

[1] Ruffhead's *Pope*, 214 *n.*

letters points to Voltaire. Writing to Swift, Bolingbroke says:—'In the epistle, a part of which you showed me, mention is made of the author of three *Occasional Letters*, a person entirely unknown. I would have you insinuate there, that the only reason Walpole can have to ascribe them to a particular person, is the authority of one of his spies, who wriggles himself into the company of those who neither love, esteem, nor fear the minister, that he may report, not what he hears (since no man speaks with any freedom before him) but what he guesses.'[1] Could Bolingbroke, who had placed his house at Voltaire's disposal, and who himself had brought about Voltaire's intimacy with Pope, possibly speak of Voltaire as wriggling his way into their company? On the other hand, there is a reference in one of Voltaire's English letters which shows that in some way or another he had been connected with these political letters of Bolingbroke's. The reference as it stands is a little mysterious:—'Do not talk of the occasional writer. Do not say it is not of my lord Bolingbroke; do not say it is a wretched performance: you cannot be judge neither of the man nor of this writing.'[2] The whole incident remains uncertain and unexplained. If Ruffhead's story is true, it is at least curious that there should never have been any personal breach between either Pope or Bolingbroke

[1] Swift, *Works*, xvii. 110. May 18, 1727.
[2] Voltaire to Thieriot, May 27, 1727. *Works*, xxxiii. 171.

and Voltaire. There is no hard or spiteful word by the one against the other either in Pope's extensive correspondence or in Voltaire's ten thousand letters. Is it conceivable that if Pope had felt conscious of a grievance against Voltaire he would not have revenged himself in a cutting couplet, or that Voltaire, if he had thought himself slightingly treated by Pope, would not have cut into the quick of the sensitive poet with an epigram or a sarcasm which would have been a torture to Pope till the day of his death? Yet there is nothing but evidence of kindly feelings. Voltaire had hardly returned to France when he asked to be remembered 'to the glutton Pope,' and at Cirey his talk with Madame de Châtelet often turned admiringly on Pope and his works. Pope sent Voltaire a copy of the *Essay on Man*, and Voltaire's mathematical and metaphysical Marquise, the divine Emilie herself, corresponded with Twickenham. She was grateful to Voltaire for having procured her Pope's friendship. 'He has always,' she wrote to Pope, 'spoken to me about you with an infinite esteem.'[1]

Voltaire's admiration of Pope's literary gifts and workmanship was unbounded. He had praised Pope unstintedly in an already quoted letter, and elsewhere in his works he says:—'Pope is, I think, the most elegant, the most correct, and, what is more, the most harmonious of English poets.' 'I do not make

[1] *L'Amateur d'Autographes*, 1865; p. 78. Cirey, May 12, 1732.

such beautiful verses as Pope,' Voltaire remarked once in 1756, in a familiar letter to Thieriot. He adapted Denham's lines and applied them to Pope's poetry:—

> Que votre poésie et forte et naturelle
> Me soit de la Tamise une image fidèle:
> Soyez profond, mais clair; soyez doux, sans lenteur;
> Plein, sans vous déborder; rapide, sans fureur.

The peculiar, and not very characteristically English excellencies of Pope's literary method were of the kind which the French poet could thoroughly appreciate. But Voltaire drew a very clear line between Pope the literary artist and Pope the reasoner and metaphysician. 'Have you read the translation of Pope's *Essay on Man*?' he asks one of his old teachers. 'It is a beautiful poem, but mixed with very false ideas on *happiness*.' No one now takes with seriousness the elementary platitudes and confused inconsistencies which form the so-called argument of the *Essay on Man*. Pope himself did not understand the subject which he was professing to treat. His concern was solely with the form of the work, and he merely gave his most incisively finished literary expression to material which Bolingbroke collected for him from Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* and from Leibnitz's *Théodicée*. Voltaire, enjoying the poem as a piece of literary workmanship—he repeatedly calls it the first of didactic poems—could not much trouble himself with its contradictions and

obscurities; but he made a few reflections on it to his friend, the Marquise du Deffant:—

'Allow me to speak more positively to you about Pope. You tell me that as a result of social love *whatever is, is right.* In the first place, what he very inappropriately calls social love is not at all in his view the foundation and the proof of the order of the universe. Whatever is, is right, because an infinitely wise Being is its author, and that is the subject of the first Epistle. Then in the last Epistle he gives the name of social love to that beneficent Providence through which animals live by devouring one another. Lord Shaftesbury, who was the first to lay down parts of this system, rightly thought that God had implanted self-love in man in order to induce him to preserve his own existence; and social love, which is an additional but much less potent instinct than self-love, is the foundation of society.

'But it is very strange to say that there is some undefined social love in God which drives all the species of animals to devour one another with irresistible fury. There seems to be design in that, I admit; but it is a design which certainly cannot be called love. All Pope's work swarms with similar obscurities; but at every moment some lightning-flash pierces through the darkness.'[1]

Voltaire thought the *Essay on Man* 'the most beautiful, the most useful, the most sublime didactic poem that has ever been composed in any language,' but its complacent optimism thoroughly irritated him.

[1] *Works*, xxxiv. 57. March 18, 1736.

The terrible Lisbon earthquake of 1755, which so affected the child Goethe, gave Voltaire only too painful an opportunity for a protest against Pope's optimistic theories. If Pope had been at Lisbon, asked Voltaire, would he have dared to say: *Whatever is, is right?* Voltaire wrote a poem on this earthquake, and said to a friend:—'I am sorry to attack my friend Pope, and I admire him all the same. I am only afraid of being too orthodox, because that does not become me very well; but resignation to the Supreme Being is always becoming.'[1] During the military horrors of the Seven Years' War, Voltaire burst out in English:—'Let the happy madmen who say that all that is, is well, be confounded! 'Tis not so indeed with twenty provinces exhausted, and with three hundred thousand men murdered.'[2]

Two of Voltaire's utterances on this subject include some recollections of Pope:—

'Those who exclaim that all is well are charlatans. Shaftesbury, who made the fable fashionable, was a very unhappy man. I have seen Bolingbroke a prey to vexation and rage, and Pope, whom he induced to put this sorry jest into verse, was as much to be pitied as any man I have ever known, mis-shapen in body, dissatisfied in mind, always ill, always a burden to himself, and harassed by a hundred enemies to his very last moment. Give me at least the names of some happy men who will tell me: All is well.'[1]

[1] *Works*, xxxix. 13. [2] *Id.* xl. 185.
[3] *Id.*, xxviii. 535.

Once more Voltaire wrote:—

'There is evil in the world, and it is mere mockery to say that a thousand misfortunes make up happiness. . . . A workman who has bad materials and bad tools has a perfect right to say: I could not do my work any better; but my poor Pope, my poor hunch-back, whom I knew and loved, who told you that God could not have formed you without a hump? You laugh at the story of the apple; but, humanly speaking, and omitting the question of its sacredness, it is more reasonable than Leibnitz's optimism which gives you the reason why you are hunch-backed, sick, and a little malicious.

'We need a God who speaks to the human race. Optimism is desperation; a cruel philosophy under a soothing name. Alas! if all is well while all is in a state of suffering, we may pass into a thousand other worlds where still there will be suffering and still all will be well . . . and, indeed, if all is well, how can the disciples of Leibnitz admit the existence of a better? . . . Between ourselves, my dear sir, the whole thought of Leibnitz and Shaftesbury and Bolingbroke and Pope was only to say clever things. For myself, I suffer, and I say so.'[1]

To Voltaire, Pope was the English Boileau. In a poetical epistle addressed to Madame Denis in 1748, Voltaire says:—

> L'ombre de Pope avec les rois repose;
> Un peuple entier fait son apothéose,
> Et son nom vole à l'immortalité.

[1] *Works*, xxxviii. 556. February 28, 1756.

The *Rape of the Lock* was in Voltaire's judgment the best mock-heroic poem in existence. But Voltaire was scandalised by the coarseness and abusiveness which Pope allowed himself in personal satire, and asked whether the lines on Hervey were written by Pope or by one of his chairmen.

A sentence from a now quite forgotten Frenchman who had some slight measure of intimacy with Voltaire brings together the names of Voltaire, Pope, and Bolingbroke. One Burigny, author of a long letter on one of Voltaire's innumerable literary squabbles, there says :—

'I had many times seen Voltaire at Bolingbroke's, who loved him; I remember that one day the talk at Bolingbroke's turned on Pope and Voltaire; he knew them both equally; he was asked which of the two he preferred. He replied that they were the two finest geniuses of France and of England; but that there was much more philosophy in the head of the English poet than in Voltaire.' [1]

Voltaire's friendship with Bolingbroke and the excellent introductions which he brought with him from France, opened up to him all the English circles of rank and intellect which he could have desired to enter. At the time of Voltaire's visit, Walpole's contemptuous neglect of literature was already beginning

[1] *Lettre de M. de Burigny à M. l'Abbé Mercier, sur les démêlés de M. de Voltaire avec M. de Saint-Hyacinthe*, p. 27 (London and Paris, 1780). This letter, which is now rare, is reprinted in Voltaire's *Works*, i. 465 sq.

to drive the best writers into the opposition party. With some of these literary lights of opposition Voltaire became acquainted at the house of Bubb Dodington. When the French foreign minister asked Horatio Walpole to help Voltaire with recommendations for England, Walpole wrote to Dodington as well as to the Duke of Newcastle :—

'Dear Sir,—Mr. Voltaire, a French poet, who has wrote several pieces with great success here, being gone for England in order to print by subscription an excellent poem, called *Henry IV.*, which, on account of some bold strokes in it against persecution and the priests, cannot be printed here; M. de Morville, the Maecenas, or, I may truly say, the Dodington here, for the encouragement of wit and learning, has earnestly recommended it to me to use my credit and interest for promoting this subscription among my friends; on which account, as well as for the sake of merit, I thought I could apply myself nowhere more properly than to you; and I hope this will answer the particular view and interest which I have in it myself, which is to renew a correspondence so agreeable to me; who am, with the greatest truth and affection, Sir, your most obedient and most humble servant,

'H. Walpole.'[1]

Bubb Dodington, Lord Melcombe, is little remembered now. He lived at a time when political morality was exceedingly low, and his name has become a by-word for the meanest jobbery and the

[1] May 29, 1726.

seamiest side of politics. In 1754, when he was a candidate for Bridgewater, he notes in his *Diary* that three days of his canvassing were 'spent in the infamous and disagreeable compliance with the low habits of venal wretches.' The venal wretches did not elect him. He was exceedingly rich, was by no means without wit, and was fond of dispensing literary patronage. He welcomed Voltaire very hospitably, and Voltaire spent three months in his house. Voltaire always remembered Dodington and his kindness. In 1743 he wrote of him as a man who was very rich, very active, very resolute, and very witty. In his turn Voltaire himself wrote to him, introducing his friend Thieriot:—

'Sir,—I took lately the liberty to send you the *History*, or rather an *Essay on the History of King Charles the Twelfth*. Now I beg leave to make you a better present. M. Thieriot, who will render you this, is a friend of mine who travels for his pleasure, and learns English for his instruction. I have so often spoken to him of all the favours you honoured me with, that I could not forbear charging him with the thanks I must return to your kindness. I will never let slip an opportunity of making you sensible of my gratitude, not only to you but to England; and I cannot better express my love to your country, than by procuring to my friend the honour of your acquaintance; for travellers judge of a country by the men they have seen: and certainly, by that highest esteem which I profess for the English nation,

one may easily perceive I had the honour once to enjoy Mr. Dodington's conversation.

'I am, with respect and gratitude, sir, your most humble obedient faithful servant,

'Voltaire.'[1]

Long afterwards, nearly thirty years after he had seen Dodington, Voltaire wrote him another English letter :—

'I was very sick in the month of January, at the foot of the Alps, when a handsome youth did appear in my cabin, next to Lausanne, and favoured me with your kind letter written in September; the date from Eastbury. . . . I pass the winter by Lausanne, and the other seasons by Geneva, without care and without Kings. That country would not perhaps agree with a Frenchman of twenty-five; but it is most convenient to old age; when one is past sixty, the place of reason is a private station. Yet, though I am mightily pleased with these lands of peace and freedom, I would gladly see another land of liberty again before I die; I would have the honour to see you again, and renew to you my sincere and everlasting gratitude for all the tokens of kindness I received from you when I was in London.

'My good Countrymen have sometimes upbraided me for having too much of the English spirit in my way of thinking; it should be but just I should pay a visit to those who have drawn that reproach upon

[1] *Works*, xxxiii. 200. The English is Voltaire's, and the date is probably 1733, in which year Thieriot was in England arranging for the publication of Voltaire's *Letters on the English*.

me; be sure, dear sir, none was more guilty than you. I hope I should find you in good health, for you are born as sound and strong as Nature made me weak and unhealthy. I hope the evening of your day is serene and calm; 'tis the best lot of that hour: you have enjoyed all the rest.

'I am, with the tenderest respect, sir, your most humble and obedient servant,

'Voltaire.' [1]

It was at Eastbury, the country seat in Dorsetshire, where Dodington played the Maecenas in a very kindly way, that Voltaire formed a friendship with the poet Edward Young. The poem which has preserved Young's name for posterity was still unwritten, and Young himself, although he was not very far from fifty when Voltaire met him, had not yet taken orders in the Church, and had not lived a life of very great elevation or dignity. He had some reputation as a poet and dramatist, and he had addressed to great men and powerful patrons various metrical pieces of fulsome flattery. He was a frequent visitor at Eastbury. One of the two or three best known anecdotes told of Voltaire in England belongs to the period when Voltaire and Young were fellow-guests together at Dodington's. Their talk one day fell on Milton and *Paradise Lost*. In the English Essay on Epic Poetry which Voltaire published at the end of 1727, he enthusiastically spoke

[1] Seward, *Anecdotes of Distinguished Persons*, iv. 458.

of *Paradise Lost* as 'the noblest work which human imagination hath ever attempted.' But at the same time there were episodes in the poem which appeared to Voltaire intolerable and disgusting, and if one passage offended him more than another it was the episode of Sin and Death. In this slight and early Essay, and whenever in latter life Milton was the subject of his pen or conversation, Voltaire descanted on this particular passage with unfailing censure. An allegory, he said, should be short, decent, noble; this allegory was none of the three. He blamed Milton, too, for describing his allegorical conceptions as acting in ways which were only compatible with the conduct of human existences. 'Such shadowy beings as Death, Sin, Chaos, are intolerable when they are not allegorical.' But above all he found fault with the horror and loathsomeness of the fiction. 'That complication of horrors, that mixture of incest, that heap of monsters, that loathsomeness so far fetched, cannot but shock a reader of delicate taste.'

Voltaire poured out to Young all his objections to this part of Milton's poem, and ridiculed it with all his wit. Young, in his defence of Milton, is said to have brought the discussion to an epigrammatic conclusion. He matched in his mind Voltaire's slight, emaciated figure with the 'meagre shadow' of Milton's Death, and spoke—but surely not in Voltaire's hearing—the lines:—

You are so witty, profligate, and thin,
At once we think thee Milton, Death, and Sin.[1]

Young in later years dedicated to Voltaire a very miserable metrical production which he entitled *Sea Piece*, and seems to think that he had persuaded Voltaire to form a less grudging estimate of Milton :—

'Tell me,' say'st thou, 'who courts my smile?
What stranger strayed from yonder isle?'
No stranger, sir! tho' born in foreign climes;
On Dorset downs, when Milton's page,
With *Sin* and *Death*, provok'd thy rage,
Thy rage provok'd, *who* sooth'd with gentle rhymes?

Who kindly couch'd thy censure's eye,
And gave thee clearly to descry
Sound judgment giving law to fancy strong?
Who half inclin'd thee to confess,
Nor could thy modesty do less,
That Milton's blindness lay not in his song?

Young's conversation was probably better than these sad verses. Dodington told Warton that Young's talk at Eastbury far outshone Voltaire's. 'Nobody,' says Warton of Young, 'ever said more brilliant things in conversation. The late Lord Melcombe informed me that when he and Voltaire were on a visit to his lordship at Eastbury, the English poet was far superior to the French in the variety

[1] This is the version of the lines which is given in the *Life of Young*, written by Croft for Dr. Johnson. Mrs. Delany, in February, 1728, quoting a slightly different form of the not very wonderful epigram, assigns it to Lord Hervey. Mrs. Delany's *Autobiog. and Correspondence*, i. 160.

and novelty of his bon-mots and repartees; and Lord Melcombe was himself a good judge of wit and humour, of which he himself had a great portion.'[1] Voltaire's only recorded criticism on Young is a very contemptuous estimate of the *Night Thoughts*. He wrote to Young's French translator:—

'You have done much honour to my old friend Young; I think the translator has more taste than the author. You have put whatever order was possible into this confused collection of bombastic and obscure common-places. Sermons are not made to be turned into verse; everything should have a place of its own. That is why the younger Racine's poem on *Religion*, which is worth far more than all Young's poems put together, is hardly ever read. I believe all foreigners will like your prose better than Young's poetry. He was half a clergyman and half a poet.'[2]

It was probably also at Dodington's that Voltaire met Thomson. In 1727 Thomson joined the band of opposition writers, and his *Britannia*, published in that year, was an attack on Walpole's peace policy with Spain. In the same year Thomson was dedicating his *Summer* to Dodington, whose guest at Eastbury he sometimes certainly was. He speaks of Dodington as 'my youthful Muse's early friend,' and praises his goodness, wit, and gay but unoffending sociability. In *Autumn* he celebrates the home

[1] Warton, *Essay on the Genius of Pope*, ii. 143.
[2] *Works*, xlvi. 353. June 7, 1769.

which had received himself as it had received Young and Voltaire:—

In this glad season, while his sweetest beams
The sun sheds equal o'er the meeken'd day,
Oh, lose me in the green delightful walks
Of, Dodington, thy seat, serene and plain;
Where simple Nature reigns; and every view,
Diffusive, spreads the pure Dorsetian downs,
In boundless prospect: yonder shagg'd with wood,
Here rich with harvest, and there white with flocks.
Meantime the grandeur of thy lofty dome,
Far-splendid, seizes on the ravish'd eye.
New beauties rise with each revolving day;
New columns swell; and still the fresh Spring finds
New plants to quicken, and new groves to green.
Full of thy genius all! the Muses' seat;
Where in the secret bower, and winding walk,
For virtuous Young and thee they twine the bay.
Here wand'ring oft, fir'd with the restless thirst
Of thy applause, I solitary court
Th' inspiring breeze; and meditate the book
Of Nature ever open; aiming thence
Warm from the heart, to learn the moral song.

In an English letter to Lord Lyttelton, Voltaire records his impressions of Thomson and his works:—

'You was beneficent to Mr. thomson when he liv'd, and you is so to me, in favouring me with his works. j was acquainted with the Author when j stayed in England. j discovered in him a great genius and a great simplicity. j lik'd in him the poet and the true philosopher, j mean the lover of mankind. I think that without a good stock of such a philosofy, a poet is just above a fidler, who amuses our ears and cannot go to our soul. I am not surpriz'd y^r^ nations has done more justice to Mr.

thomson's Seasons than to his dramatic performances. there is one kind of poetry of which the judicious readers and the men of taste are the proper judges, there is an other that depends upon the vulgar; great or small, tragedy and comedy are of these last species, they must be suited to the turn of mind and to the ability of the multitude and proportion'd to their taste. Yr nasion two hundred years since is us'd to a wild scene, to a croud of tumultuous events, to an emphatical poetry mix'd with lose and comical expressions, to murtherss, to a lively representation of bloody deeds, to a kind of horrour which seems often barbarous and childish, all faults which never stain'd the greak, the roman, or the french Stage; and give me leave to say that the taste of yr politest Countrymen in point of tragedy differs not much in point of tragedy from the taste of a mob at Bear-garden. 'tis true we have too much of words, if you have too much of action, and perhaps the perfection of the Art should consist in a due mixture of the french taste and english energy. Mr. Adisson who would have reach'd to that pitch of perfection had he succeeded in the amourous part of his tragedy as well as in the part of cato, warn'd often yr nation against the corrupted state of the stage—and since he could not reform the genius of the country, j am affraid the contagious distemper is past curing.

'Mr. thompson's tragedies seems to me wisely intricated, and elegantly writ, they want perhaps some fire, and it may be that his heroes are neither moving nor busy enough, but taking him all in all, methinks he has the highest claim to the greatest esteem.

'Y^r friendship, Sir, is a good vouschafer for his merit. I know what reputation you have acquired, if I am not mistaken, you have writ for y^r own sport many a thing that would rouse a great faime to one who had in view that vain reward call'd glory. I have by me some verses that pass under y^r name, and which you are suppos'd to have writ in a journey to paris, they reflect very justly on our nation, and they run thus—

> a nation here j pity and admire,
> whom noblest sentiments of Glory fire,
> yet taught by custom's force and bigot fear
> to serve with pride, and boast the yoke they wear;
> in courts a mean, in camps a gen'rous band,
> from priests and tax-jobbers content receive
> those laws their dreaded arms to Europe give,
> whose people vain in war, in bondage blaze,
> tho' plunder'd guai, industriouss tho' oppressed, etc.

These verses deserve a good translator, and they should be learn'd by every frenchman. Give me leave to send you a little performance of mine, 'tis but a pebble I do offer you for y^r pretious stones. I am, with the highest respect, S^r, y^r most humble, obedient servant, 'Voltaire.'[1]

In a later letter to a French friend, Voltaire said of Thomson :—

'I knew him some forty years ago. If he could have been a little more interesting in his plays and a little less declamatory, he would have reformed the

[1] Phillimore's *Lyttelton*, i. 323. Paris, May 17, 1750 (N.S.). Voltaire's mangled quotation is from Lyttelton's *Poetical Epistle* from Paris to his late tutor, Dr. Ayscough, written about 1728.

English theatre which the clown Shakespeare gave birth to and ruined.' [1]

Voltaire, contrasting the somewhat severe and even cheerless aspects of Nature in the north with the bright gaiety of open-air life in the sunnier south, did not think that the subject of the Seasons was a happy one for a Scotchman like Thomson. The inhabitants of the fifty-fourth degree know nothing, says Voltaire, of the vintage which was sung by Theocritus and Virgil, the joyous origin of the first spectacles and the first festivals.

'They sadly gather their inferior, insipid apples, while we see under our windows a hundred boys and girls dancing round the cars which they have loaded with delicious grapes. Thomson did not dare to touch this subject.' [2]

The only hackneyed anecdote connected with Voltaire in England is the story of his first interview with Congreve. Voltaire had a very high opinion of Congreve's plays. In his *Lettres Philosophiques* he says that Congreve, whom he calls the Molière of England, carried the glory of the comic stage further than any other Englishman. 'His plays are only too few, but they are all excellent of their kind. They rigorously observe the rules of the theatre. They are full of characters shaded off with extreme delicacy; there is no false or objectionable wit; the language everywhere is that of honourable people though the

[1] *Works*, xliii. 140. February 28, 1764. [2] *Id.* xlvi. 350.

actions are the actions of knaves; and this proves that Congreve knew well the people he had to deal with, and that he 'lived in what is called good society.' Unfortunately, Voltaire was not so much impressed by Congreve himself as by his works. Congreve, with detestable affectation, pretended to look upon his works—the only things that made him a man of any consequence whatever—as trifles which he had thrown off in a carelessly condescending way, light efforts, which it was not worth while to consider as of any serious consequence in his life. Voltaire was always far from thinking that in respect of literature all else was naught, but he was annoyed by such foppish superciliousness. Congreve was drawing very near his end when Voltaire visited him at his lodging off the Strand:—

'He was infirm and almost dying when I knew him. He had one defect: he did not sufficiently esteem his first profession of authorship, which had made his fortune and his reputation. He spoke to me of his works as trifles which were beneath his notice, and in our first conversation he told me to look upon him merely as a gentleman who lived a very simple life. I replied that if he had had the misfortune of being only a gentleman like any other, I would never have come to see him. I was shocked at vanity so out of place.'[1]

The name of Congreve naturally suggests that of the Dowager Duchess of Marlborough. Two very

[1] *Works*, xxii. 160.

curious anecdotes are told of Voltaire and the Duchess. At Blenheim one day Voltaire ventured to ask to see the Memoirs which it was well known that Sarah of Marlborough was writing. 'Wait a little,' said the Duchess; 'I am at present altering my account of Queen Anne's character; I have begun to love her again since the present lot have become our governors.' Such a story, which would hardly have been invented, is quite in keeping with the Duchess's extraordinary ways. The other story is told by Goldsmith:—

'Among . . . . those who either patronised him [Voltaire], or enrolled themselves in the list of his friends, was the Duchess of Marlborough. She found infinite pleasure in the agreeable vivacity of his conversation; but mistook his levity for want of principle. Such a man seemed to her the properest person to digest the Memoirs of her life; which, even so early as this, she had an inclination of publishing. She proposed the task accordingly to him, and he readily undertook to oblige her. But when she showed him her materials, and began to dictate the use she would have them turned to, Voltaire appeared no longer the good-natured, complying creature which she took him for. He found some characters were to be blackened without just grounds, some of her actions to be vindicated that deserved censure, and a mistress to be exposed to whom she owed infinite obligations. Our poet accordingly remonstrated with her Grace, and seemed to intimate the inconsistency of such a conduct with gratitude and justice. He gravely assured her that the publication of secrets which were communi-

cated under the seal of friendship would give the world no high opinion of her morals. He was thus continuing his discourse, when the Duchess, quite in a passion, snatched the papers out of his hands. I thought, said she, the man had sense; but I find him at bottom either a fool or a philosopher.'[1]

The greatest English writer whom Voltaire met was Swift. During his period of retirement in the autumn of 1726, Voltaire probably did not see Swift, though Swift was in England on matters of business, arranging for the publication of *Gulliver*. Soon after its appearance in November of that year Swift returned to Ireland, but he was back again in March or April, 1727, to stay some six months in England. He spent much of this time with Pope at Twickenham, and with Bolingbroke at Dawley, or in London. It was probably during this period that he and Voltaire first met. Voltaire also saw much of Swift during the three months' visit which he paid to Lord Peterborough. An English gentleman who died so lately as 1826, at the age of eighty-nine, dined once with Voltaire at Ferney in 1765, and has left a brief account of their talk that day at table. 'He told me,' says this Major Broome, 'of his acquaintance with Pope, Swift (with whom he lived for three months at Lord Peterborough's), and Gay, who first showed him the *Beggars' Opera* before it was acted. He says he admired Swift, and loved Gay vastly. He

[1] Goldsmith's *Works*, iv. 24. Goldsmith quotes no authority.

said that Swift had a great deal of the *ridiculum acre*.'[1]

Voltaire was much impressed by Swift and his Works. He placed him far above Rabelais, whom, indeed, Voltaire in his early life always spoke of very contemptuously :—

'Swift is called the English Rabelais. He has, like Rabelais, the honour of being a clergyman and of jesting at everything; but Rabelais was not above his age, and Swift is far above Rabelais. Our Meudon *curé*, in his extravagant and unintelligible book, is of abundant gaiety and of still more abundant impropriety ; he is lavish of erudition, of dirt, and of dulness. A good story of a couple of pages is paid for by volumes of stupidities. . . . Swift is Rabelais in his sound senses and living in good society. To be sure he has not Rabelais' gaiety ; but he has all the delicacy, the judgment, the sureness of selection, the good taste which our *curé* is without. Swift's verses are in a peculiar and almost inimitable style ; he has the gift of happy jest in verse and prose, but, quite to understand him, one should make a short stay in England.'[2]

In the same strain, Voltaire elsewhere says that Swift's verses are of an elegance and *naïveté* worthy of Horace. The *Tale of a Tub*, the book which ruined

[1] Extract from the MS. Journal of Major W. Broome, the most intimate friend of Sir Henry Grattan, Speaker of the Irish House of Commons. Printed in *Notes and Queries*, November 18, 1854.

[2] *Works*, xxii. 174.

all Swift's chance of a bishopric, roused Voltaire almost to enthusiasm. 'It is,' he says, 'a treasure-house of pleàsantry which one gets no idea of in any other writer. Pascal is only amusing at the expense of the Jesuits; Swift diverts and instructs at the expense of the human race. How I love the English daring! How I love people who say what they think! We only half live if we dare only half think.'[1] But Voltaire's admiration of Swift's work had its critical limits, and naturally the second half of *Gulliver* was displeasing to him. In one of his earliest English letters he says that the first volume 'strikes at the first; the other is overstrained. The reader's imagination is pleased and charmingly entertained by the new prospect of the lands which Gulliver discovers to him; but that continued series of new fangles, follies of fairy tales, of wild inventions, palls at last upon our taste. Nothing unnatural may please long; it is for this reason that commonly the second parts of romances are so insipid.'[2]

In the summer of 1727 Swift had thoughts of spending a month or two in France. The plan came to nothing, but not before Voltaire had shown his friendliness for Swift by supplying him with letters of introduction to Paris and elsewhere. He wrote in English to Swift himself:—

'I send you here enclosed two letters, one for Mr.

[1] *Works*, xl. 193. To Marquise du Deffant; October 13, 1759.
[2] *Id.* xxxiii. 167. To Thieriot; March, 1727.

de Morville, our Secretary of State, and the other for Mr. de Maisons, both desirous and worthy of your acquaintance. Be so kind as to let me know if you intend to go by Calais, or by the way of Rouen. In case you resolve to go by Rouen, I will give you some letters for a good lady,[1] who lives in her country castle just by Rouen. She will receive you as well as you deserve. There you will find two or three of my intimate friends, who are your admirers, and who have learned English since I am in England. All will pay you all the respects, and procure all the pleasures they are capable of. They will give you a hundred directions for Paris, and provide you with all the requisite conveniences. Vouchsafe to acquaint me with your resolution; I shall certainly do my best endeavours to serve you, and to let my country know, that I have the inestimable honour to be one of your friends. I am, with the highest respect and esteem, your most humble, obedient, faithful servant,

'Voltaire.'[2]

One great Englishman Voltaire just failed to see. Newton died some ten months after Voltaire's arrival in England. How deeply Newton's funeral in Westminster Abbey impressed Voltaire will duly be noted. He afterwards formed some friendship with Mrs.

[1] Madame de Bernières, who had been very helpful in the private printing of *La Ligue* at Rouen.

[2] Swift's *Works*, xvii. 114. Undated, but probably written in June, 1727. June 14, 1727, is the date of another letter of introduction which Voltaire wrote to a friend at Calais for Swift. *Hist. MSS. Commission; 9th Report, Appendix*, p. 475.

Conduit, Newton's niece, and in his *Lettres Philosophiques* he has a little anecdote to tell:—

'Mr. Conduit, Newton's nephew, assured me that his uncle, at the age of twenty, read Descartes, that he pencilled the margins of the first pages, making only one single and often repeated note, the word: *Error*; but that, growing tired of writing the word *Error* everywhere, he threw the book away and never opened it again.

The preservation of a far more famous anecdote is also due to Voltaire. Mrs. Conduit told him the world-famous story of Newton and the apple, and Voltaire told it twice in his works.'[1]

The glimpses of Voltaire's personal intercourse with other distinguished Englishmen than those already named are very slight. Though he did not see Newton, he saw Newton's friend, Dr. Samuel Clarke. In 1726, Voltaire and Clarke had several interviews. One little thing made a great impression on Voltaire. He noticed that Clarke never pronounced the name of God without a very remarkable air of contemplation and respect. When Voltaire confessed the impression which this made upon him, Clarke told him that he had insensibly taken this custom from Newton; a custom, adds Voltaire himself, which really ought to be that of all men.[2]

Under the guidance of Clarke, Voltaire gave some attention to metaphysics. But the ground was not

[1] *Works*, xxii. 434, 520. [2] *Id.* xxii. 403.

solid enough for Voltaire. He liked Clarke personally, he tells us, and he respected his memory, 'because he was a good man'; but 'the stamp of his ideas, which he had put upon my still weak brain, was effaced when this brain of mine had gained a little strength for itself.' Voltaire himself writes :—

'I could not, when I was in England, have the consolation of seeing the great Newton, who was nearing his end. But the famous Samuel Clarke, Newton's friend, disciple, and commentator, was kind enough to give me some information respecting that department of philosophy which wishes to rise above mere calculation and the senses. To tell the truth, I did not find in him that cautious anatomy of the human understanding, that blind-man's staff which supported the walk of the modest Locke as he sought his way and found it; in a word that knowledge and therefore that timidity which arrested Locke on the edge of the abyss. Clarke leaped into the abyss, and I ventured to follow him. One day, full of these great investigations which delight the mind by their immensity, I said to a very enlightened man in the company: "Clarke is a far greater metaphysician than Newton." "Very likely," he coldly replied; "in other words you only say that one blows better bubbles than the other." This reply made me retreat into myself. Since that time I too have ventured to prick some of these bubbles of metaphysics, and I have noticed that nothing came out of them but wind. And when I once said to M. de S'Gravesande: *Vanitas vanitatum, et metaphysica*

vanitas, he replied to me: I am very sorry to say that you are right.' [1]

That Voltaire and Clarke met repeatedly is certain. That Voltaire, whatever he might think of Clarke's metaphysics, respected and admired him as a man, is proved by repeated passages in his Works. Yet mendacious anecdote insists on stepping in here also. In 1763 Boswell was at Utrecht, and there he met one Rev. William Brown, minister of the Utrecht Scotch Church. Their talk turned on Voltaire, and the Rev. Mr. Brown had this story to tell:—

'When M. Voltaire was in England he had a great desire to see Dr. Clarke, but the Doctor, who had heard his character, would not be acquainted with him; at last he fell in with a friend of Dr. Clarke's, who asked him to be of a party where the Doctor was. Voltaire went and seated himself next to the Doctor, in full expectation of hearing him talk, but he remained very silent. Voltaire, in order to force him to speak, threw out all the wild profane rhodomontades that his imagination could suggest against religion. At last Dr. Clarke turned about, and looking him steadily in the face, with the keen eagle eyes for which he was remarkable, "Sir," said he, "do you acknowledge that two and two make four?" Voltaire was so confounded by this that he said not another word.' [2]

And not another word need be said.

With Berkeley, too, Voltaire came into some con-

[1] *Works*, xxiii. 194. [2] *Boswelliana*, p. 219.

tact, though no details of their intercourse have survived. Voltaire speaks of Berkeley as a man 'in whom love of the public good is the ruling passion.' *Alciphron* appeared soon after Voltaire left England, and the kindly Hampstead Quaker, who had shown hospitality to Voltaire, sent him the book, hoping that it would do him good and help him to be orthodox. Voltaire replied in a letter, 'the original of which is in the hands of a friend of mine in Essex Street':—

'My good Friend,—I thank you heartily for the book you have been pleased to favour me with; I am extremely sensible of your kindness, and own I have not received without vanity these marks of your remembrance.

'I have read out the whole book; your mind and mine do not deal in insincerity; therefore I must tell you plainly that the Doctor's sagacity has pleased more than convinced me. I admire his acute genius, without assenting to him; and will profess myself one of his admirers, but not of his disciples. In short, good Sir, I believe in God, not in priests; it appears too plainly, this is a party book, rather than a religious book. The Doctor endeavours to draw his readers to himself, rather than to religion. In many places he is more captious and acute, than solid and judicious: I have known the man; he is certainly a learned philosopher, and delicate wit. I thank you extremely again for the present, and I do remain, for ever,

'Your true friend,

'Voltaire.'[1]

[1] *A Collection of Letters*, by Leonard Howard, D.D., i. 604 (1753).

CHAPTER VI

VOLTAIRE'S LITERARY WORK IN ENGLAND

WHILE Voltaire was thus enjoying the friendship of so many distinguished Englishmen, and eagerly studying the life and literature of the country of his exile, he was also abundantly busy with literature of his own. He was producing prose, verse, and drama, polishing and completing his own epic poem, and criticising the epic poets of all times and nations. He was writing for his friend Thieriot, with a view to later publication in France, letters on the religious, social, and literary characteristics of a country where some things seemed ridiculous to him, many things admirable, all things strange and surprising. He was at work on his tragedy *Brutus*. He was assiduously frequenting the society of men who had been the personal friends of Charles the Twelfth, and nearly the whole of Voltaire's Life of the Swedish King was written during the comparatively short, but exceedingly fruitful, period of his residence in England.

The first book actually published by Voltaire in England was the little volume containing the two

English Essays to which slight reference has already been made. As the production of a foreigner, whose acquaintance with the language in which he was now writing was so exceedingly recent as Voltaire's, this little book is indeed one of the curiosities of literature. It was published towards the close of 1727, and its title-page ran: *An Essay upon the Civil Wars of France. Extracted from curious Manuscripts. And also upon the Epick Poetry of the European nations from Homer down to Milton. By M. de Voltaire. London. Printed by Samuel Jallasson, in Prujean's Court, Old Bailey, and sold by the Booksellers of London and Westminster, M.DCC.XXVII.* Copies of this first edition are exceedingly rare. One specimen, of unique interest, the copy which Voltaire himself presented to Sir Hans Sloane, Physician to the King and President of the Royal Society, is to be found in the Library of the British Museum. It is inscribed in Voltaire's own handwriting and in his peculiar orthography: *to S^r^ hanslone from his most humble servant voltaire.* As early as January, 1728, the advertisement columns of the London newspapers announced a second edition, 'corrected by the Author';[1] and as they at the same time intimated that the English, and first really complete edition of Voltaire's Epic was now nearly ready for delivery to subscribers, Voltaire appears on the title-page of this second edition of his *Essays* as 'Mr. de Voltaire, Author of the *Henriade*.'

[1] *Daily Journal* and *Daily Post.* January 8, 1728.

The appearance of a fourth edition in 1731 is proof of the ready welcome which English readers offered to Voltaire, the English writer, while as late as 1760 another edition was printed at Dublin. To this Dublin edition was prefixed a very brief account of Voltaire, purporting—and quite possibly purporting truly—to be written by J.S.D.D.D.S.P.D., letters which were easily enough intelligible in a country where the name of Jonathan Swift, D.D., Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin, was a household word. In 1760 Swift had been dead for fifteen years, and it is quite conceivable that the use of these initial letters may have been the mere device of an unscrupulous publisher. But internal evidence shows that there can hardly have been any attempt to deceive; for one sentence of this little Introduction runs: 'His [Voltaire's] Heroick Poem is finished, and now printing in London by subscription.' The 'now' of this sentence is explained in a footnote as being 1728. This would suggest that as early as 1728 there had been a Dublin edition of Voltaire's *Essays*; and, in that case, an introductory note by Swift, whose friendship with Voltaire had begun in England the year before, would have been a very natural thing. It is fair, however, to add that Voltaire's bibliographers are not acquainted with any such edition.

The first of Voltaire's two Essays was a brief sketch of the French Civil Wars which form the subject of the *Henriade*. Voltaire, who always had a

keen eye to business, intended this little production to be a preliminary advertisement of his forthcoming poem. He frankly says so himself in the last sentence of his Preface:—

'As to the present Essay, it is intended as a kind of Preface or Introduction to the *Henriade*, which is almost entirely printed, nothing being wanting but the printing of the Cuts, which I must recommend here as particular Master-Pieces of Art in their kind: 'tis the only Beauty in the Book, that I can answer for.'

These *Essays*, written and published by Voltaire in England, are now practically unobtainable in the English dress which Voltaire originally gave them. When they appear in the editions of his Works it is only in a modified form and in a French translation. The French reader who cares to know how the young Gibbon could compose in the French language can turn only with difficulty to the *Essai sur l'Étude de la Littérature*. And the English work of the most famous of modern Frenchmen is quite out of the reach of the English reader of to-day. Quotation which, in other circumstances, would be unjustifiable, is in this case not only legitimate, but even requisite. Voltaire's account of the St. Bartholomew massacre may serve as a specimen of what he could do in the English language:—

'At last, one Night (which was the Eve of St. Bartholomew, in the Month of August, 1572) at

Twelve a-clock, the Signal is given, all the Houses of the Protestants are forced open at once; the Admiral Coligny, alarmèd by the Uproar, rises out of Bed; a Troop of Assassins rush into his Chamber; one Besme, a Lorrainer, bred up a Servant in the Family of Guise, was at their head; he thrusts his Sword into the Admiral's Breast, and gives him a back stroke on the Face.

'Henry, the young Duke of Guise, the same who framed afterwards the Catholick League, and who was murdered at Blois, was at the Door of Coligny's House, waiting for the Assassination; and cried aloud, *Besme, is it done?* Immediately the Assassines threw the Body out of the Window. Coligny fell, and expired at the Feet of Guise; the young Man trampled upon him, not that he was drunk with the furious Catholick Zeal of Persecution, which at that time intoxicated half France, but he was prompted by the Spirit of Revenge, which, tho' not generally so unmerciful as the fury of Religion, yet leads often to more base actions.

'Mean while all the Friends of Coligny are assaulted throughout Paris; Men, Women, and Children, are promiscuously slaughtered; every Street was strown with expiring Bodies: Some Priests holding up a Crucifix in one Hand, and a Sword in the other, ran at the head of the Murderers, and encouraged them in the name of God, to spare neither Relations nor Friends.

'Tavannes, Mareshal of France, an ignorant and superstitious Soldier, who join'd the Fury of Religion to the Rage of Party, rid a horseback through Paris,

crying to his Soldiers, *Let Blood, let Blood, Bleeding is wholesome in the Month of August as well as in May.*

'The King's Palace was one of the chief Theatres of Murder, for the Prince Henry of Navarre had his Lodgings in the Louvre, and all his Domesticks were Protestants; many of them were killed in their Beds with their Wives; others were flying naked, and pursued by the Soldiers on the Stair-Cases, through all the Rooms of the Palace, nay even to the King's Antichamber (*sic*). The young Wife of Henry of Navarre, awakened by the dreadful Uproar, fearing for her Husband, and for herself, struck with Horror and half dead, runs from her Bed in order to throw herself at the feet of the King her Brother; she scarce had opened the Door of her Chamber, when some of her Protestant Servants rush into it for refuge; the Soldiers enter after them; they pursue them in the sight of the Princess; one who crept under her Bed was killed there; one other pierced with Halberts fell at her Feet, and she was all covered with their Blood.

'There was a young Nobleman very much in the King's favour, for his comely Air, his Honesty, and a certain peculiar Happiness in the Turn of his Conversation.

''Twas the Earl of la Rochefoucault, Great-grandfather to the present Marquis of Montendre, who came over into England during another Persecution, less cruel but not less unjust. La Rochefoucault had spent the Evening till Eleven a clock with the King in a pleasant Familiarity, and had given a

Loose to the Sallies of his Imagination with the utmost Mirth and Alacrity.

'The King felt a Remorse, and was struck with a start of Compassion towards him; he bid him two or three times not to go home, but to lie in his Chamber. La Rochefoucault answered, he should go to his Wife. The King pressed him no further, and said, *Let him go. I see God has decreed his Death.* The young Man was massacred two hours after. . . .

'Mean while many of those miserable Victims fled to the River-side; some were swimming over to the Fauxbourg St. Germain. The King saw them from his Window, which look'd upon the River, and (what is almost incredible, but too true) he fired upon them with a Carbine. Catherine de Medicis, undisturbed and serene in the midst of the Slaughter, look'd down from a Balcony situated towards the City, encouraged the Assassins, and laugh'd at the dying Groans of the Murdered . . . .

'The Court reeking with the Blood of the Nation, tried some days after to palliate such a Crime with Forms of Law. They justified the Massacres with a Calumny; they imputed to the Admiral, a Conspiracy which nobody believed. The Parliament was ordered to proceed against the Memory of Coligny, his dead Body was hanged in Chains at the Gallows of Montfaucon. The King himself went to see that loathsome Spectacle, and as one of his Courtiers advised him to retire, and complain'd of the Stench of the Corpse, the King answer'd, *A dead Enemy smells sweet.*'

The second and longer Essay is more interesting.

It is still an extremely readable little piece containing various literary views and criticisms which give it a place of really considerable value in the story of Voltaire's literary life. Remembering that he was writing for English readers, Voltaire took occasion to diversify his account of the great European Epics with various passing allusions to English writers of repute. Of the Odyssey he says absolutely nothing, and he lets it be plainly seen that he cared very little for the Iliad; but the mention of Homer serves to introduce a compliment to Pope:—

'As to Homer, those who cannot read him in the Original, have Mr. Pope's Translation; they may discern the Fire of that Father of Poetry, reflected from such a polish'd and faithful Glass. I will neither point out his Beauties, since none of them are lost in the Translation; nor cavil at his Faults, which are for the most part lessen'd or embellish'd.'

Lucan, in much the same way, suggests a word on Addison:—

'Mr. Addison borrow'd from the *Pharsalia* some Strokes, in the drawing of his *Cato*. That antient Poet never received a greater Honour, than when he was imitated by Mr. de Corneille, and by Mr. Addison, two Men every way superior to him.'

When the sweep of his literary survey brings Voltaire to the Portuguese Epic, Waller and Denham find a place in his brief remarks on Camoens. It seems that Voltaire criticised the *Lusiad* at second-

hand, probably deriving his knowledge of the poem from the English version by Sir Richard Fanshawe; a sentence in his observations shows that he did not read Portuguese. Though Voltaire was always fond of introducing short scraps of foreign languages into his own private correspondence, it would perhaps be safe to say that there is not a single Portuguese sentence in all the endless volumes of his letters. Indeed, Warton says that till he came to England Voltaire was ignorant of the very name of Camoens:—

'Colonel Martin Bladen was a man of some literature, and translated Cæsar's Commentaries. He was uncle to my . . . . friend, Mr. William Collins the poet . . . . I remember Collins told me that Bladen had given to Voltaire all that account of Camoens inserted in his Essay on the Epic Poets of all Nations; and that Voltaire seemed before entirely ignorant of the name and character of Camoens.'[1]

However this may have been, this is the passage in Voltaire's Essay:—

'His [Camoens'] Poem, in my Opinion, is full of numberless Faults and Beauties, thick sown near one another; and almost in every Page, there is what to laugh at, and what to be delighted with. Among his

[1] Dr. Joseph Warton: Note to *Dunciad*, iv. 560. Quoted in the *Parliamentary History*, vii. 459*n*. Colonel Martin Bladen's translation of Cæsar's *Commentaries* appeared in 1712. Collins's uncle was *Edmund* Bladen.

most lucky Thoughts, I must take notice of two, for the Likeness which they bear to two most celebrated Passages of Waller and Sir John Denham. Waller says in his Epistle to Zelinda:

> Thy matchless Form with Credit bring,
> To all the Wonders I can sing.

Camoens says, in speaking of the voyages of the Argonauts, and of Ulysses, that the Undertaking of the Portuguese shall give Credit to all those Fables, in surpassing them.

'Sir John Denham, in his poem on Coopers-Hill, says to the Thames:

> O could I flow like thee, and make thy Stream
> My great Example, as it is my Theme;
> Though deep, yet clear; though gentle, yet not dull;
> Strong without rage, without o'erflowing full.

Camoens addresses the Nymphs of Tagus in the like manner: O Nymphs, if ever I sung of you, inspire me now with new and strong Lays; let my Stile flow like your Waves; let it be deep and clear, as your Waters, etc.[1]

'It is not to be inferr'd from thence, that Waller and Sir John Denham have imitated Camoens; we must only conclude, that Wit is of the Growth of every Country. It is very unjust, and very common, to call Plagiarism what is but Resemblance.'

These casual comments, interesting only because they are Voltaire's, doubtless found their place in his

[1] This is a proof that Voltaire had not read Camoens in the original, for there is no such passage in the poem. It is an interpolation of the translator Fanshawe. See Mickle's Introduction to his translation of the *Lusiad* (1776).

book merely because he was writing in the English language for English readers. But Voltaire's criticism on Milton belongs to the plan of the *Essay*. In scattered passages of his Correspondence, and notably in one chapter of *Candide*, Voltaire in later years relieved himself of much contemptuous ridicule of Milton and *Paradise Lost*. In this *Essay*, however, written immediately after deliberate study of a poet to whose Works Voltaire probably never returned after his departure from England, the criticism is careful and serious. Of Voltaire's later observations on Milton there will be a word to say further on. But he never again treated Milton in so great detail as here, and he never again wrote of the English poet in the English language. The English reader has perhaps some little right to complain that so interesting and so unique a work is practically inaccessible. A somewhat lengthy quotation from Voltaire's chapter on Milton may partly supply the deficiency:—

'Milton is the last in Europe who wrote an Epick Poem, for I wave all those whose Attempts have been unsuccessful, my Intention being not to descant on the many who have contended for the Prize, but to speak only of the very few who have gain'd it in their respective Countries.

'Milton, as he was travelling through Italy in his Youth, saw at Florence a Comedy call'd *Adamo*, writ by one Andreino a Player, and dedicated to Mary de Medicis Queen of France. The Subject of the Play was the Fall of Man; the Actors, God, the Devils, the Angels,

Adam, Eve, the Serpent, Death, and the seven mortal Sins. That Topick so improper for a Drama, but so suitable to the absurd Genius of the Italian Stage, (as it was at that time) was handled in a manner intirely conformable to the Extravagance of the Design. The Scene opens with a Chorus of Angels, and a Cherubim thus speaks for the rest: "Let the Rainbow be the Fiddlestick of the Fiddle of the Heavens, let the Planets be the Notes of our Musick, let Time beat carefully the Measure, and the Winds make the Sharps," etc. Thus the Play begins, and every Scene rises above the first in Profusion of Impertinence.

'Milton pierc'd through the Absurdity of that Performance to the hidden Majesty of the Subject, which being altogether unfit for the Stage, yet might be (for the genius of Milton, and for his only) the Foundation of an Epick Poem.

'He took from that ridiculous Trifle[1] the first Hint of the noblest Work, which human Imagination hath ever attempted, and which he executed more than twenty years after.

'In the like manner, Pythagoras ow'd the Invention of Musick to the Noise of the Hammer of a Blacksmith. And thus in our Days, Sir Isaac Newton walking in

[1] This assertion of Voltaire's was immediately declared to be absurd. When Voltaire published a much enlarged French version of this Essay he said that Milton took from Andreino's farce the idea of a tragedy, of which he composed an act and a half. 'I have been assured of this,' says Voltaire, 'by men of letters who had it from Milton's daughter, who died while I was in London.' This was Deborah Milton, who died in 1727. Milton originally intended a drama, not an epic.

his Gardens, had the first Thought of his system of Gravitation, upon seeing an Apple falling from a Tree.

'If the Difference of Genius between Nation and Nation ever appear'd in its full light, 'tis in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

'The French answer with a scornful Smile, when they are told there is in England an Epick Poem, the Subject whereof is the Devil fighting against God, and Adam and Eve eating an Apple at the Persuasion of a Snake. As that Topick hath afforded nothing among them, but some lively Lampoons, for which that Nation is so famous, they cannot imagine it possible to build an Epick Poem upon the Subject of their Ballads. And indeed such an Error ought to be excused; for if we consider with what Freedom the politest Part of Mankind throughout all Europe, both Catholicks and Protestants, are wont to ridicule in Conversation those consecrated Histories; nay, if those who have the highest Respect for the Mysteries of the Christian Religion, and who are struck with Awe at some Parts of it, yet cannot forbear now and then making free with the Devil, the Serpent, the Frailty of our first Parents, the Rib which Adam was robb'd of, and the Like; it seems a very hard task for a profane Poet to endeavour to remove those Shadows of Ridicule, to reconcile together what is divine, and what looks absurd, and to command a Respect that the Sacred Writers could hardly obtain from our frivolous Minds.

'What Milton so boldly undertook, he perform'd with a superior Strength of Judgment, and with an Imagination productive of Beauties not dream'd of

before him. The Meanness (if there is any) of some Parts of the Subject, is lost in the Immensity of the poetical Invention. There is something above the reach of human Forces to have attempted the Creation without Bombast, to have describ'd the Gluttony and Curiosity of a Woman without Flatness, to have brought Probability and Reason amidst the hurry of imaginary Things belonging to another World, and as far remote from the Limits of our Notions, as they are from our Earth,—in short, to force the Reader to say, "If God, if the Angels, if Satan would speak, I believe they would speak as they do in Milton."

'I have often admir'd [*wondered*] how barren the Subject appears, and how fruitful it grows under his hands.

'The *Paradise Lost* is the only Poem wherein are to be found, in a perfect degree, that Uniformity which satisfies the Mind, and that Variety which pleases the Imagination: All its Episodes being necessary Lines, which aim at the Centre of a perfect Circle. Where is the Nation who would not be pleas'd with the Interview of Adam and the Angel? With the Mountain of Vision, with the bold Strokes which make up the relentless, undaunted, and sly character of Satan? But above all, with that sublime Wisdom which Milton exerts, whenever he dares to describe God, and to make him speak? He seems indeed to draw the Picture of the Almighty as like as Human Nature can reach to, through the mortal Dust in which we are clouded.

'The Heathens always, the Jews often, and our

Christian Priests sometimes, represent God as a Tyrant infinitely powerful. But the God of Milton is always a Creator, a Father, and a Judge; nor is his Vengeance jarring with his Mercy, nor his Predeterminations repugnant to the Liberty of Man. These are the Pictures which lift up indeed the Soul of the Reader. Milton in that Point, as well as in many others, is as far above the ancient Poets, as the Christian religion is above the Heathen Fables.

'But he hath especially an indisputable Claim to the unanimous Admiration of Mankind, when he descends from those high Flights to the natural Description of human Things. It is observable, that in all other Poems, Love is represented as a Vice, in Milton only 'tis a Virtue. The Pictures he draws of it, are naked as the Persons he speaks of, and as venerable. He removes with a chaste hand, the Veil which covers every where else the Enjoyments of that Passion. There is Softness, Tenderness, and Warmth, without Lasciviousness; the Poet transports himself and us into that State of innocent Happiness, in which Adam and Eve continued for a short time. He soars not above human, but above corrupt Nature; and as there is no Instance of such Love, there is none of such Poetry.

'How then it came to pass that the *Paradise Lost* had been so long neglected, (nay, almost unknown) in England, (till the Lord Sommers, in some measure, taught Mankind to admire it) is a thing which I cannot reconcile, neither with the Temper, nor with the Genius of the English Nation.

'The Duke of Buckingham in his *Art of Poetry*

gives the Preference to Spencer. It is reported in the Life of the Lord Rochester, that he had no notion of a better Poet than Cowley.

'Mr. Dryden's Judgment on Milton is still more unaccountable. He hath bestow'd some verses upon him, in which he puts him upon a Level with, nay above Virgil and Homer:

> The force of Nature could no further go;
> To make a third, she join'd the former two.

'The same Mr. Dryden, in his Preface upon his Translation of the *Æneid*, ranks Milton with Chapellain, and Lemoine, the most impertinent Poets who ever scribbled. How he could extol him so much in his Verses, and debase him so low in his Prose, is a Riddle, which, being a Foreigner, I cannot understand.

'In short, one would be apt to think, that Milton had not obtained his true Reputation, till Mr. Addison, the best Critick, as well as the best Writer of his Age, pointed out the most hidden Beauties of the *Paradise Lost*; and settled for ever its Reputation.

'It is an easy and a pleasant Task to take notice of the many Beauties of Milton, which I call universal: But 'tis a ticklish Undertaking, to point out what would be reputed a Fault in any other Country.

'I am very far from thinking, that one Nation ought to judge of its Productions by the Standard of another; nor do I presume, that the French (for Example) who have no Epick Poets, have any Right to give Laws on Epick Poetry.

'But I fancy many English Readers, who are

acquainted with the French Language, will not be displeas'd to have some Notion of the Taste of that Country: And I hope they are too just either to submit to it, or despise it barely upon the score of its being foreign to them. . . . . .

'I'll venture to say, that none of the French Criticks could like the Excursions which Milton makes sometimes beyond the strict Limits of his Subject. They lay down for a Rule, that an Author himself ought never to appear in his Poem, and that his own Thoughts, his own Sentiments, must be spoken by the Actors he introduces. Many judicious Men in England comply with that Opinion, and Mr. Addison favours it. I beg leave in this place to hazard a Reflection of my own, which I submit to the Reader's Judgment.

'Milton breaks the Thread of his Narration in two Manners. The first consists of two or three kinds of Prologues, which he premises at the beginning of some Books. In one place he expatiates upon his own Blindness; in another he compares his Subject, and prefers it to that of the Iliad, and to the common Topicks of War, which were thought before him the only Subject fit for Epick Poetry; and he adds, that he hopes to soar as high as all his Predecessors, unless the cold Climate of England damps his Wings.

'His other way of interrupting his Narration, is by some Observations, which he intersperses now and then upon some great Incident, or some interesting Circumstance. . . . . As to the first of these two Heads, I cannot but own that an Author

is generally guilty of an unpardonable Self-love, when he lays aside his Subject to descant on his own Person: but that human Frailty is to be forgiven in Milton; nay, I am pleas'd with it. He gratifies the Curiosity it raises in me about his Person; when I admire the Author, I desire to know something of the Man; and he whom all Readers would be glad to know, is allow'd to speak of himself. But this however is a very dangerous Example for a Genius of an inferior Order, and is only to be justified by Success. . . . . .

'To come to more essential Points and more liable to be debated: I dare affirm, that the Contrivance of the Pandaemonium would have been entirely disapprov'd of by Criticks like Boileau, Racine, etc.

'That Seat built for the Parliament of the Devils, seems very preposterous: Since Satan hath summon'd them altogether, and harangu'd them just before in an ample Field. The Council was necessary; but where it was to be held, 'twas very indifferent. The Poet seems to delight in building his Pandaemonium in Doric Order with Freeze and Cornice, and a Roof of Gold. Such a Contrivance savours more of the wild Fancy of our Father le Moine, than of the serious Spirit of Milton. But when afterwards the Devils turn Dwarfs to fill their Places in the House, as if it was impracticable to build a Room large enough to contain them in their natural Size; it is an idle Story, which would match the most extravagant Tales. And to crown all, Satan, and the chief Lords preserving their own monstrous Forms, while the Rabble of the Devils shrink into Pigmies,

heightens the Ridicule of the whole Contrivance to an unexpressible degree. Methinks the true Criterion for discerning what is really ridiculous in an Epick Poem, is to examine if the same thing would not fit exactly the Mock-Heroick. Then I dare say that nothing is so adapted to that ludicrous way of Writing, as the Metamorphosis of the Devils into Dwarfs.

'The Fiction of Death and Sin, seems to have in it some great Beauties, and many gross Defects. In order to canvass this Matter with Order, we must first lay down, that such shadowy Beings, as Death, Sin, Chaos, are intolerable when they are not allegorical. For Fiction is nothing but Truth in Disguise. It must be granted too, that Allegory must be short, decent, and noble. For an Allegory carried too far or too low, is like a beautiful Woman who wears always a Mask. An Allegory is a long Metaphor; and to Speak too long in Metaphors must be tiresome, because unnatural. This being premis'd, I must say, that in general those Fictions, those imaginary Beings, are more agreeable to the Nature of Milton's Poem, than to any other; because he hath but two natural Persons for his Actors, I mean Adam and Eve. A great part of the Action lies in imaginary Worlds, and must of course admit of imaginary Beings. . . . . .

'I see with Admiration, Sin, the Portress of Hell, opening the Gates of the Abyss, but unable to shut them again. That is really beautiful, because 'tis true. But what signifies Satan and Death

quarrelling together, grinning at one another, and ready to fight?

'The Fiction of Chaos, Night, and Discord, is rather a Picture, than an Allegory; and, for ought I know, deserves to be approv'd, because it strikes the Reader with Awe, not with Horror.

'I know the Bridge built by Death and Sin, would be dislik'd in France. The nice Criticks of that Country would urge against that Fiction, that it seems too common, and that it is useless; for Men's Souls want no paved Way, to be thrown into Hell, after their Separation from the Body.

'They would laugh justly at the Paradise of Fools, at the Hermits, Fryars, Cowls, Beads, Indulgencies, Bulls, Reliques toss'd by the Winds, at St. Peter's waiting with his Keys at the Wicket of Heaven. And surely the most passionate Admirer of Milton, could not vindicate those low, comical Imaginations, which belong by Right to Ariosto.

'Now the sublimest of all the Fictions calls me to examine it. I mean the War in Heaven. The Earl of Roscommon, and Mr. Addison (whose Judgment seems either to guide, or to justify the Opinion of his Countrymen) admire chiefly that Part of the Poem. They bestow all the Skill of their Criticism, and the Strength of their Eloquence, to set off that favourite Part. I may affirm, that the very Things they admire, would not be tolerated by the French Criticks. The Reader will perhaps see with Pleasure, in what consists so strange a Difference, and what may be the Ground of it.

'First, they would assert, that a War in Heaven

being an imaginary Thing, which lies out of the Reach of our Nature, should be contracted in two or three Pages, rather than lengthen'd out into two Books; because we are naturally impatient of removing from us the Objects which are not adapted to our Senses.

'According to that Rule, they would maintain, that it is an idle Task to give the Reader the full Character of the Leaders of that War, and to describe Raphael, Michael, Abdiel, Moloch, and Nisroch, as Homer paints Ajax, Diomede, and Hector.

'For what avails it to draw at length the Picture of these Beings, so utterly Strangers to the Reader, that he cannot be affected any way towards them? By the same Reason, the long Speeches of these imaginary Warriors, either before the Battle, or in the Middle of the Action, their mutual Insults, seem an injudicious imitation of Homer.

'The aforesaid Criticks would not bear with the Angels plucking up the Mountains, with their Woods, their Waters, and their Rocks, and flinging them on the heads of their Enemies. Such a Contrivance (they would say) is the more puerile, the more it aims at Greatness. Angels arm'd with Mountains in Heaven, resemble too much the Dipsodes in Rabelais, who wore an Armour of Portland Stone six Foot thick.

'The Artillery seems of the same Kind, yet more trifling, because more useless.

'To what purpose are these Engines brought in? Since they cannot wound the Enemies, but only remove them from their Places, and make them tumble down: Indeed (if the Expression may be forgiven) 'tis to play at Nine-pins. And the very thing

which is so dreadfully great on Earth, becomes very low and ridiculous in Heaven.

'I cannot omit here, the visible Contradiction which reigns in that Episode. God sends his faithful Angels to fight, to conquer, and to punish the Rebels. Go (says he, to Michael and Gabriel)

> And to the Brow of Heaven
> Pursuing, drive them out from God and Bliss,
> Into their Place of Punishment, the gulph
> Of Tartarus, which ready opens wide
> His fiery Chaos to receive their Fall.

'And how does it come to pass, after such a positive Order, that the Battle hangs doubtful? And why did God the Father command Gabriel and Raphael, to do what he executes afterwards by his Son only.

'I leave it to the Reader, to pronounce, if these Observations are right, or ill-grounded, and if they are carried too far. But in case these Exceptions are just, the severest Critick must however confess, there are Perfections enough in Milton, to attone for all his Defects.

'I must beg leave to conclude this Article on Milton, with two Observations.

'His Hero (I mean Adam, his first Personage) is unhappy. That demonstrates against all the Criticks, that a very good Poem may end unfortunately, in spight of all their pretended Rules. Secondly, the *Paradise Lost* ends compleatly. The Thread of the Fable is spun out to the last. Milton and Tasso have been careful of not stopping short and abruptly. The one does not abandon Adam and Eve, till they are

driven out of Eden. The other does not conclude, before Jerusalem is taken. Homer and Virgil took a contrary Way; the Iliad ends with the Death of Hector; the Æneid, with that of Turnus; The Tribe of Commentators have upon that enacted a Law, that a House ought never to be finish'd, because Homer and Virgil did not compleat their own; but if Homer had taken Troy, and Virgil married Lavinia to Æneas, the Criticks would have laid down a Rule just the contrary.'

Though this little book is the only work which Voltaire actually wrote and printed in English, it represents but a very small part of his literary labours in England, and is not even the whole of his work in the English language. The astonishment and delight which, as he has himself recorded, he experienced when he saw Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar* played on the London stage, produced so strong an effect upon him that, while he was still staying at Wandsworth, he began to plan and to write a play on a Roman subject. He chose the story of the elder Brutus who condemned his own son to death for the sake and cause of liberty. Voltaire wrote the first act of his play in English prose at Falkener's house, finishing the piece in French after his return to his own country. With Bolingbroke, who had probably suggested the choice of the subject, Voltaire frequently discussed the story of the play while he was at work on the English act; and when the completed *Brutus*

was published in French, in 1731, it was to Bolingbroke that Voltaire dedicated it:—

'If I dedicate to an Englishman a work which is played in Paris, it is not because my own country is without enlightened judges and excellent understandings to whom I could have paid this homage; but you know that the tragedy of *Brutus* was born in England. You will remember that when I was in retirement at Wandsworth, at the house of that worthy and virtuous citizen, my friend Mr. Falkener, I occupied myself there by writing the first act of this play in English prose, and the French verse in which it now appears is almost a literal translation of what I wrote in English. I sometimes talked with you about it, and we were both surprised that no English author had chosen this subject, for it is perhaps more suitable than any other to the English theatre. You encouraged me to continue a work so well suited for the expression of exalted sentiments. Though my *Brutus* is written in a foreign language, pray allow me to offer it to you, *docte sermonis utriusque linguæ*, to you who could give me lessons in French as well as in English, and who at least could teach me to give to my language the force and the energy which are inspired by a noble freedom of thought. If the feelings of the soul are bold and vigorous, the language will be vigorous too; the forcible thinker is also the forcible speaker.'[1]

In this republican play—of course Voltaire was never a republican in the modern sense of the word—

[1] *Works*, ii. 311. The original is in French.

there is clear evidence of the influence which the free institutions and national liberty of England had exerted on Voltaire. Hatred of arbitrary power is the keynote of the piece. It is impossible to doubt that many of the expressions and sentiments of the play had, in Voltaire's mind, direct reference to his own country and his own times. Some of them seem even personal to himself. He must have been thinking of his own unjust imprisonment when he wrote:—

> Arrêter un Romain sur de simples soupçons,
> C'est agir en tyrans.

And doubtless he had the French in view in the lines:—

> Esclaves de leurs rois, et même de leurs prêtres,
> Les Toscans semblent nés pour servir sous des maîtres.

Another couplet is a direct comparison between England and France:—

> La Grèce entière est libre, et la molle Ionie
> Sous un joug odieux languit assujettie.

Goldsmith was able to give a short specimen of the original English of Voltaire's first Act. Porsena, who has been fighting in support of the expelled Tarquin, sends an ambassador to the Roman Senate. When the ambassador begins to reproach the senators as breakers of the oaths of obedience which they had sworn to Tarquin, Brutus interrupts him, telling him that Tarquin's own falseness to his oath has freed the senators from theirs:—

'Allege not ties; his [Tarquin's] crimes have broke them all. The gods themselves, whom he has offended, have declared against him. Which of our rights has he not trod upon? True, we have sworn to be his subjects, but we have not sworn to be his slaves. You say you've seen our Senate in humble suppliance pay him here their vows. Even here himself has sworn to be our father, and make the people happy in his guidance. Broke from his oaths, we are let loose from ours; since he has transgressed our laws, his the rebellion, Rome is free from guilt.'

This English passage reappears in these French verses :—

N'alléguez point ces nœuds que le crime a rompus,
Ces dieux qu'il outragea, ces droits qu'il a perdus.
Nous avons fait, Arons, en lui rendant hommage,
Serment d'obéissance, et non point d'esclavage;
Et puisqu'il vous souvient d'avoir vû dans ces lieux
Le Sénat à ses pieds, faisant pour lui des vœux,
Songez qu'en ce lieu même, à cet autel auguste,
Devant ces mêmes dieux, il jura d'être juste.
De son peuple et de lui tel était le lien;
Il nous rend nos serments lors qu'il trahit le sien;
Et dès qu'aux lois de Rome il ose être infidèle,
Rome n'est plus sujette, et lui seul est rebelle.[2]

In the *Notice to the Reader* which Voltaire prefixed to his two English Essays in 1727 he announced his intention of writing an account of his visit to England. This was another literary work which occupied him, though perhaps not in a very formal way, during his

[1] Goldsmith's *Works*, iv. 20. Ed. Cunningham.
[2] *Brutus*, Act i., Scene ii. *Works*, ii. 330.

residence at Wandsworth. From time to time, Voltaire sent to his friend Thieriot letters descriptive of the new political and intellectual world which England had displayed to him. Voltaire himself dates some of these letters in 1727, and says that most of them were written in 1728. Thieriot speaks generally of them as having been composed between 1728 and 1731. When Voltaire returned to France in 1729, he began to bring together this collection of scattered documents, to re-touch and to enlarge them. Though they were intended chiefly for French readers and were therefore written in French, it is a little singular that the book made its first appearance in England and in English. The difficulties in the way of publication in France were endless and seemingly insuperable. Voltaire could neither venture to say in French what he really wished to say about the literature, philosophy, and government of England, nor could he succeed when he attempted to gain the goodwill of the censorship by softening down passages which in England would have been mere commonplaces. This illiberalism and bigotry so disgusted him with the arbitrary intolerance and narrow-minded tyranny of the men in power in France that he longed for a life of liberty in England again. That could not be; but Voltaire at least resolved that his Letters should be translated into English and published in London. In 1733 Thieriot was in London, and Voltaire wrote to him :—

'Would to heaven, my dear Thieriot, that I could live along with you in a free country! My health alone has kept me till now at Paris . . . . Let the *English Letters* be printed in English; that will give us time to discover what the English public thinks about them, before letting the work appear in French . . . . Above all, my dear Thieriot, do not fail to state particularly in the Preface that these *Letters* were written to you, most of them in 1728. You will only be saying what is true. Most of them really were written about that time, at the house of our dear and virtuous friend Falkener.' [1]

Thieriot did as Voltaire asked. He secured an English translator, and in 1733 the book appeared, entitled *Letters concerning the English Nation. By Mr. De Voltaire.* Thieriot contributed a Preface which Voltaire himself had revised. As this Preface, which contains some interesting particulars, is not reproduced in the French editions of Voltaire's English Letters, it is now practically unobtainable:—

'The present work appears with confidence in the kingdom that gave birth to it: and will be well satisfied with its Fortune, if it meets with as favourable a reception as has been indulg'd to all the other compositions of its author. The high esteem which Mr. de Voltaire has always discover'd for the English, is a proof how ambitious he is of their approbation. 'Tis now grown familiar to him, but then he is not tir'd with it; and indeed one would be apt to think that

[1] *Works*, xxxiii. 364. July 24, 1733.

this circumstance is pleasing to the nation, from the strong desire they have to peruse whatever is publish'd under his name.

'Without pretending therefore to any great penetration, we may venture to assure him that his Letters will meet with all the success that cou'd be wish'd. Mr. de Voltaire is the author of them, they were written in London, and relate particularly to the English nation; three circumstances which must necessarily recommend them. The great freedom with which Mr. de Voltaire delivers himself in his various observations, cannot give him any apprehensions of their being less favourably receiv'd upon that account, by a judicious people who abhor flattery. The English are pleas'd to have their faults pointed out to them, because this shews at the same time, that the writer is able to distinguish their merit.

'We must however confess, that these Letters were not design'd for the public. They are the result of the author's complacency and friendship for Mr. Thieriot, who had desir'd him, during his stay in England, to favour him with such remarks as he might make on the manners and customs of the British nation. 'Tis well known that in a Correspondence of this kind, the most just and regular writer does not propose to observe any method. Mr. de Voltaire in all probability follow'd no other rule in the choice of his subjects than his particular taste, or perhaps the queries of his friend. Be this as it will, 'twas thought that the most natural order in which they cou'd be plac'd, would be that of their respective dates. Several particulars which are mention'd in

them make it necessary for us to observe, that they were written between the latter end of 1728, and about 1731. The only thing that can be regretted on this occasion is, that so agreeable a correspondence should have continued no longer.

'The reader will no doubt observe, that the circumstances in every letter which had not an immediate relation to the title of it, have been omitted. This was done on purpose; for letters written with the confidence and simplicity of personal friendship, generally include certain things which are not proper for the press. The public indeed thereby often lose a great many agreeable particulars; but why should they complain, if the want of them is compensated by a thousand beauties of another kind? The variety of the subjects, the grace of the diction, the solidity of the reflexions, the delicate turn of the criticism; in fine, the noble fire, which enlivens all the compositions of Mr. de Voltaire, delight the reader perpetually. Even the most serious Letters, such as those which relate to Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy, will be found entertaining. The author has infus'd into his subject all the delicate touches it was susceptible of; deep and abstruse enough to shew that he was master of it, and always perspicuous enough to be understood.

'Some of his English readers may perhaps be dissatisfied at his not expatiating farther on their Constitution and their Laws, which most of them revere almost to idolatry; but this reservedness is an effect of Mr. de Voltaire's judgment. He contented himself with giving his opinion of them in general reflexions, the cast of which is entirely new, and which prove

that he had made this part of the British polity his particular study. Besides, how was it possible for a foreigner to pierce thro' their politicks, that gloomy labyrinth, in which such of the English themselves as are best acquainted with it, confess daily that they are bewilder'd and lost?'

Thieriot was not wrong in predicting that the book would be a success. It was eagerly read in England. 'The philosophical, political, critical, poetical, heretical, and diabolical *Letters*,' wrote Voltaire, 'are selling in London with great success. But then the English are accursed heretics, who are all ready to approve the work of the Devil. I am very much afraid that the Gallican Church will be rather more hard to please.' The Gallican Church refused to be pleased on any terms. When the harmless little book did struggle into print in France in 1734 the clergy demanded its suppression. It was officially condemned as dangerous to religion and to the order of civil society, and was publicly burnt by the common hangman. The work is slight, and does not pretend to be much more than superficial. But it is pleasantly written, and has by no means lost its interest for the reader of to-day. Its four and twenty Letters may roughly be said to fall into four divisions in which Voltaire discourses agreeably on the religious, the political, the philosophical, and the literary life of England, as he saw it. The book was a revelation of England to France. Before its

appearance Newton was to France hardly even a name; Locke, who had indeed been translated into French, had found an exceedingly limited French audience; Bacon, known as Lord Chancellor, was quite unknown as philosopher and writer; while even French men of letters were unacquainted with the names of Shakespeare, Pope, and Addison. Voltaire's book, says Condorcet, marks the date of a revolution in France. 'It was the beginning of a taste in France for English philosophy and literature. It was the first book to interest us in the manners, the politics, and the commerce of the English people, and to spread the English language among us. Afterwards, the old indifference was replaced by a puerile infatuation, and it is exceedingly remarkable that it was Voltaire himself who had the distinction of fighting against this infatuation and of diminishing its influence.'[1] The title *Letters concerning the English Nation* belongs to the book only in its English form. In Voltaire's Works it is known as *Lettres Philosophiques*.

During his stay in England, Voltaire was also much occupied with his *History of Charles the Twelfth of Sweden*. It is indeed most probable that if Voltaire had not spent these two or three years in England he would never have written what has always been one of the most popular of his books. It was in England that he gleaned nearly all his information

[1] Condorcet's *Vie de Voltaire*; in Voltaire's *Works*, i. 207–8.

about the King of Sweden and made the preliminary notes and jottings in English, some of which are still preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.[1] Voltaire, always anxious to turn his friendships to literary account, was very diligent in questioning those who could give him authentic and original information on personal or political incidents in Charles's extraordinary career. In England, Bolingbroke was one of those who assisted him in this way. The now-forgotten Jeffreys, English minister to Charles during his long exile in Turkey, was also helpful. In 1727 the Duchess of Marlborough herself gave Voltaire particulars of a celebrated interview between her husband and King Charles, an incident which had occurred twenty years before, at a moment when the allies were anxious to discover the part which Sweden was likely to play in the great war. Voltaire was thus supplied with material for a very interesting and piquant paragraph.[2] But the chief assistance which Voltaire secured in England was from a Swedish nobleman, Baron Fabrice, who had lived on very intimate terms with Charles for many of the loitering years which he passed at Bender or elsewhere in Turkey. Fabrice had become Chamberlain to George I. when George was still only Elector of Hanover, and George as King of England continued to treat him with much favour. He was in the

[1] George Bengesco's *Voltaire. Bibliographie de ses Œuvres*, i. 376.
[2] See the third book of *Charles the Twelfth*.

carriage with George on that last fatal ride to Osnabrück and at the moment of his death; and in August 1727 he arrived in England, bringing with him the jewels and other valuables which had been about the person of the late King.[1] Voltaire, perhaps as a result of his friendships at the Court of George II., or perhaps through his intimacy with Chesterfield (who gave to Fabrice the use of his house in St. James's Square), became acquainted with Fabrice, and eagerly consulted him on the subject of Charles XII. He frankly acknowledges his great indebtedness to Fabrice. In the *Commentaire Historique* which Voltaire himself dictated in 1776 to one of his secretaries he writes: 'This history [of Charles XII.] was for the most part composed in England, in the country, with M. Fabrice (Chamberlain of George I., Elector of Hanover, King of England) who had lived seven years with Charles XII. after the day of the battle of Pultowa.'[2] Voltaire's book, mainly written in 1727 and 1728, was practically finished when he returned to France in March 1729. It did not actually appear in print till 1731, and during that interval was added to and re-touched in Voltaire's usual literary manner.

The publication of this biography gave Voltaire an opportunity of expressing his gratitude to England. One De la Motraye, a Frenchman who had been at Bender during the King of Sweden's stay there,

[1] *Daily Journal*, August 21, 1727. [2] *Works*, i. 87.

attacked Voltaire's work very shortly after its appearance. In the course of his objections, De la Motraye asserted that the book was disliked by the English critics, and that Voltaire had incurred the hatred of almost all the nations which were mentioned in his narrative. Voltaire, replying to De la Motraye's criticisms one by one, wrote in answer to the charge which has the most interest for English readers: 'With what right or reason do you dare to say that M. de Voltaire has incurred the hatred of the nations of which he has spoken? It is true that his *History* has for some time been the subject of discussions in the English newspapers; but it is easy to see from these newspapers that the *History of Charles XII.* served as a pretext to party writers. M. de Voltaire's obligations to England are well known, and his sincere attachment to that nation is known also. It very ill becomes you to say that the English are displeased with a History of which there are two English translations, and which has been printed more frequently in London than in Paris. M. de Voltaire ventures to flatter himself that he has more friendly readers in England than in his own country.'[1]

It is surprising how Voltaire was able to crowd all this multifarious work into a period of time which was otherwise so much occupied with serious studies and with social distractions. But in addition to all

[1] *Works*, xvi. 366.

these various literary undertakings Voltaire, who always managed to get more out of the twenty-four hours than any other two men could do, was busied in England with the publication of a work which in his own opinion was of more consequence than all the others taken together. In his own eyes Voltaire was always the author of the *Henriade*. Fascinated in early life by the story of Henry IV. of France, the seeming chance which had led him to the historic homes of St. Ange and of Sulli, and had opened to him their stores of anecdote and reminiscence, deepened the impression which poetic fancy had already made upon him. Unfortunately, Voltaire found that it was much easier to write French national Epics than to publish them. While he had cheerfully hoped to address the dedication of *La Ligue ou Henri le Grand* to Louis XV. himself, not only was anything like royal recognition absolutely denied him, but he was even refused official permission to publish his poem at all. After finding its way secretly into print at Rouen, it was only by stealth that it could be smuggled into Paris, where, in the early months of 1724, it was being eagerly read. As it was a forbidden book, denounced alike by courtiers and by clergy, everyone felt that there must be a good deal of worth in it. It ran through various editions in its first form, and under its first name; but it was in London that it for the first time appeared in the shape which Voltaire

finally gave it, and under the universally known name of the *Henriade*. In January, 1728, a monthly magazine of literature, *The Present State of the Republick of Letters*, made the following announcement:—

'We also hope every day to see Mr. De Voltaire's *Henriade*. He has greatly raised the expectation of the curious, by a beautiful Essay he lately published upon the Civil Wars of France (which is the subject of his Poem), and upon the Epic Poets from Homer down to Milton. As this Gentleman seems to be thoroughly acquainted with all the best Poets both antient and modern, and judges so well of their beauties and faults, we have reason to hope that the *Henriade* will be a finished performance; and as he writes with uncommon elegance and force in English, though he has been but eighteen months in this country, we expect to find in his Poem all that beauty and strength of which his native language is capable.'

This notice was duly followed in February by an advertisement in the London newspapers informing those whom it might concern that 'At Messieurs Woodman & Lyon's in Russell-Street, Covent Garden, The Henriade of Monsieur Voltaire, will be delivered in March next, printed on Royal Paper with large Cuts. Those Persons who are willing to subscribe, are desir'd to send in only their Names and Places of Abode: For no Money is required, till the Delivery

of the Work; and no Books will be sold, after the Publication of it.' [1]

In March, 1728, the Poem duly appeared, a handsome, large-paper, gilt-edged quarto: *La Henriade de Mr. de Voltaire. A Londres*, 1728. It was dedicated to Queen Caroline, who, as Princess of Wales, had shown kindness to Voltaire. Caroline had a very decided turn for literature, and an inclination to theological argument. In his *Lettres Philosophiques* Voltaire says of her that, titles and crowns apart, she was born to do good, and to encourage all the arts. 'She is an amiable philosopher on the throne. She has never lost an opportunity of gaining knowledge or an occasion for proving her generosity. It was she who, hearing that a daughter of Milton was still alive and was in distress, immediately sent her a considerable present. She is the protectress of the learned M. Courayer; she deigned to be the mediator between Dr. Clarke and M. Leibnitz.' [2] This literary Queen willingly agreed to be the patroness of Voltaire's Epic. Voltaire's English dedication of his French poem is curious as a further illustration of his composition in the English language:—

'Madam,—It is the Fate of Henry the Fourth to be protected by Queens of England. He was assisted by that famous Elizabeth, who was in her Age the Glory of her Sex, and the Pattern of

[1] *The Daily Journal*, February 12, 1728.
[2] *Works*, xxii. 114.

Sovereigns. By whom can his Memory be so well protected, as by her in whom Elizabeth revives?

'Your Majesty will find in this Book, bold impartial Truths; Morality sustained with Superstition; a Spirit of Liberty, equally abhorrent of Rebellion, and of Tyranny; the Rights of Kings always asserted, and those of Mankind never laid aside.

'The same Spirit in which it is written, gave me the Confidence to offer it to the virtuous Consort of a King, who among so many crowned Heads, enjoys, almost alone, the inestimable Honour of ruling a Free Nation, a King who makes his Power consist in being beloved, and his Glory in being just.

'Our Descartes, who was the greatest Philosopher in Europe, before Sir Isaac Newton appeared, dedicated his *Principles* to the celebrated Princess Palatine Elizabeth; not, said he, because she was a Princess, for true Philosophers respect Princes, and never flatter them; but because, of all his Readers she understood him the best, and loved Truth the most.

'I beg leave, Madam, (without comparing myself to Descartes) to dedicate the *Henriade* to Your Majesty, in some measure, upon the like Account; not only as the Protectress of all Arts and Sciences, but as the best Judge of them.

'I am with that sincere Veneration, which is due to the highest Virtue, as well as to the highest Rank,

'may it please Your Majesty,

'Your Majesty's most humble, most dutiful, most obliged Servant,

'Voltaire.'

The publication of the *Henriade* gave Swift an opportunity of repaying the kindness which Voltaire had so willingly offered him the year before. At the close of 1727 Voltaire, busy with his English *Essays* and the *Henriade*, was living in Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, at the sign of the White Peruke. The house, kept by an old French barber and perruquier, immediately adjoined the famous Bedford Head Tavern, at which Voltaire is said to have been a frequent visitor.[1] From Maiden Lane, when the *Essays* were out and the *Henriade* was 'almost ready,' but still wanted a 'little help,' Voltaire wrote to Swift about his Poem:—

'in london, maidenlane at the white peruke coventgarden. 14 December.

'Sir,—You will be surprised in receiving an english essay from a french traveller. pray forgive an admirer of you, who ows to y^r^ writings the love he bears to y^r^ language, which has betrayd him into the rash attempt of writing in english.

'You will see by the advertisement that j have some designs upon you, and that j must mention you for the honour of y^r^ country, and for the improvement of mine. do not forbid me to grace my relation with y^r^ name. let me indulge the satisfaction of talking of you as posterity will do.

'jn the mean time can j make bold to intreat you to make some use of y^r^ interest in ireland about

[1] When sharp with hunger, scorn you to be fed,
Except on pea-chicks, at the Bedford Head?—*Pope.*

some subscriptions for the henriade, which is almost ready and does not come out yet for want of little help. The subscriptions will be but one guinea in hand.

'j am with the highest esteem and the utmost gratitude,

'Yr most humble and most obedient servant Voltaire.'[1]

Swift complied with Voltaire's request and did what he could to secure subscribers in Ireland. The Earl of Oxford probably helped in England; at any rate, Voltaire wrote to him, soliciting his patronage. The Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, also, Lord Carteret, doubtless did not fail to promote the success of Voltaire's poem. Carteret was on terms of the most intimate friendship with Swift, and he must also have known Voltaire. It was the custom of the time that the Lord-Lieutenant should only stay in Dublin during the actual session of the Irish Houses of Parliament; the rest of the year he spent where he pleased. Carteret, who was a great scholar and lover of literature, was the personal friend of the poets and writers whom Voltaire so gladly met in England, and the one English statesman who was an easy master of modern European languages and literatures cannot have remained a stranger to Voltaire. But only one slight allusion to the intimacy between Carteret and

[1] There is a facsimile of this letter at the end of vol. i. of *Swiftiana*. It is also printed in Swift's *Works*, xvii. 167. December 14, 1727.

Voltaire remains. When the *Henriade* was published, Voltaire wrote a second time to Swift :—

'I sent the other day a cargo of French dulness to my Lord-Lieutenant. My Lady Bolingbroke has taken upon herself to send you one copy of the *Henriade*. She is desirous to do that honour to my book; and I hope the merit of being presented to you by her hands will be a commendation to it. However, if she has not done it already, I desire you to take one of the cargo, which is now at my Lord-Lieutenant's. I wish you a good hearing;[1] if you have got it, you want nothing. I have not seen Mr. Pope this winter; but I have seen the third volume of the *Miscellanea*; and the more I read your works, the more I am ashamed of mine. I am, with respect, esteem, and gratitude, Sir, your most humble and most obedient servant,

'Voltaire.'[2]

The King and Queen of England and the members of the royal family headed the subscription list for Voltaire's poem, which, as an inspired reviewer remarked, was doubtless one of the best Epics of the year. The Queen of Prussia, a great friend of Queen Caroline of England, sent Voltaire a medallion containing Caroline's portrait. 'I will keep it very preciously all my life,' wrote Voltaire, 'since it comes to me from so great a Queen and since it represents the Queen of England, whose virtues and great

[1] Swift was much troubled with deafness.

[2] Swift's *Works*, xvii. 168. The date is the winter of 1728.

qualities naturally make one think of the Queen of Prussia.'[1] But the *Henriade* brought Voltaire more solid recompense than medals. George II. sent him a money present which some say was as large as five hundred pounds. In a preface written for a proposed edition of Voltaire's Works—a preface revised by Voltaire himself—it is said that George not only presented Voltaire with 'six mille livres' but admitted him familiarly to his private suppers.[2] The price of the quarto volume seems to have been three guineas; the 'one guinea in hand' which Voltaire mentions to Swift, was probably only a preliminary deposit. The English subscribers, among whom were the best and most distinguished of the aristocracy, numbered three hundred and forty-four; and the profits which Voltaire gained by this English edition—though no one knows exactly what they were—are commonly put down as the real beginning of a fortune larger than any ever realised by a man of letters. Some five and thirty years later, when Voltaire was bringing out an edition of Corneille's Works for the benefit of one of Corneille's descendants, he was able to say a word for the generosity of his English subscribers, and to contrast them favourably with the French:—

'Many of my subscribers, in accordance with the

[1] *Works*, xxxiii. 180.

[2] *Mémoires sur Voltaire*, by Longchamp and Wagnière, his secretaries, ii. 492.

praiseworthy custom of the French, have paid me nothing. The French are rich in words and generous in promises; the words and promises of the English are generally made good.' [1]

Voltaire the poet was always also the man of business. An English letter, which till now has only been very incorrectly printed in an obscure volume, shows the author of the *Henriade* in the characteristic light of the poet who refuses to be cheated:—

'I hear Prevost [the leading French bookseller in London] hath a mind to bring you a second time as an evidence against me. He sais j have told you j had given him five and twenty books for 30 guineas. j remember very well, S^{r}, j told you at rainbow's coffee-house, that j had given him twenty subscription receipts for the henriade, and received 30 guineas down; but j never meant to have parted with 30 copies at 3 guineas each, for 31 pounds. j have agreed with him upon quite another foot; and j am not such a fool (tho a writer) to give away all my property to a bookseller.

'Therefore j desire you to remember that j never told you of my having made so silly a bargain. j told, j own, j had £30 or some equivalent down, but j did not say 'twas all the bargain. this j insist upon, and beseech ỹou to recollect our conversation; for j am sure j never told a tale so contrary to truth, to reason, and to my interest. j hope you will not back the injustice of a bookseller, who abuses you, against a man of honour, who is y^{r} most humble servant,

'Voltaire.

[1] *Works*, lii. 594.

'j beseech you to send me an answer to my lodging without any delay. j shall be extreemly obliged to you.'[1]

As the fine quarto edition of the *Henriade* was too dear for many who were anxious to read the poem, a cheaper octavo edition also appeared in 1728 in London. Voltaire says that there were three octavo editions in less than three weeks. In an English letter to which the editors affix the impossible date of 1726,[2] Voltaire writes: 'Though the poem is written in a language not much admired here in regard to poetry, yet three editions have been made in less than three weeks, which I assure you I attribute entirely to the lucky subject I have pitched upon, and not at all to the performance.'[3]

Voltaire, whose literary vanity was great, was always exceedingly sensitive to hostile criticism. In

[1] Voltaire to Peter Des Maizeaux, one of the editors of Bayle's *Dictionary*. Very incorrectly printed in Stephen Colet's *Relics of Literature*, p. 367. The original, undated, is in the British Museum; *Sloane MSS.*, 4288; fol. 229.

[2] Everyone who has had occasion to read any of Voltaire's letters critically, knows to what depths of despair he is often reduced by their chronology. But it is rather too bad that editors of voluminous and important editions should feel themselves quite at liberty to mis-date letters in a way which the most inexperienced reader can correct. In Moland's latest and fullest edition mistakes of this kind are far too frequent. Voltaire publishes the first edition of one of his works in 1728. He afterwards writes a letter mentioning two or three subsequent editions, and his editors quietly date this letter two years before the work first appeared, and then pass on with the calm confidence which editors alone seem to possess.

[3] *Works*, xxxiii. 162.

later years it was often one of Madame du Châtelet's cares to shield him from a knowledge of fault-findings which his excitable temperament would not allow him to bear in peace. But a curious incident that occurred in connection with the London edition of the *Henriade* shows that Voltaire could be perfectly amenable to fair and reasonable criticism. Among the foreigners at that time resident in England was one Dadiky, a Greek from Smyrna, acting as an interpreter in London. Before the *Henriade* was published, Dadiky chanced to see the first sheet, which began, as all the previous editions of *La Ligue* had begun, with the lines :—

> Je chante les combats, et ce roi généreux
> Qui força les Français à devenir heureux.

Dadiky sought out Voltaire and said to him : 'Sir, I am a fellow-countryman of Homer ; he never began his poems with an epigram or an enigma.' Voltaire at once admitted the force and truth of this criticism and rejected the far-fetched couplet. In its stead he substituted the lines which have kept their place ever since :—

> Je chante ce héros qui régna sur la France
> Et par droit de conquête et par droit de naissance.

Did Voltaire ever publish a book without exposing himself, if not to persecution, at least to controversy and strife ? The columns of the London newspapers of March 1728 prove that a very lively literary quarrel immediately followed the publication of the

Henriade. On the 19th of March the *Daily Post*, announcing the issue of an edition of the poem published 'by the Author's privilege,' emphatically added: 'This Edition is not castrated, as that in Quarto, and another in Octavo, intituled, The Seconde Edition.' The addition of a criticism of the *Henriade* was also advertised as giving further attraction to this new issue. On the very next day, and in the same newspaper, appeared a decisive protest signed with Voltaire's name:—

'I having Yesterday seen in the Daily Post an Advertisement which runs thus: *By the Author's Priviledge, the Henriade, by Mr. de Voltaire, with a Criticism upon the whole Work. N.B. This Edition is not castrated as that in Quarto. Printed for Prevost.* This is to give Notice, that I never gave any Privilege to Prevost, but I was betrayed into such a kindness for one Coderc, as to grant him Leave of Printing my Book for his own Benefit, provided he should sell none before mine had been deliver'd. It is a Thing unheard of, That a Bookseller dares to sell my own Work in another Manner than I have printed it, and call my own Edition, Castrated: The Truth of the Matter is, that he has printed six bad and insignificant low Lines, which were not mine, printed in a former Edition of La Ligue, and in the Room of which there are six others a great deal bolder and stronger in the Henriade. As to the Criticism I have not yet seen it.

'I have just printed another Edition of my Book, Printed for James Woodman, with another Criticism,

which I will answer in Time, at least I must certify, that this Woodman's Edition is entirely correct, conformable to my Original, and without spurious and bad Verses, which do more harm to an Author than all the criticism in the world.

'Voltaire.'

The publisher Prevost immediately attacked Voltaire in reply, and plainly said that the poet was not telling the truth. Prevost re-inserted his advertisement, and added:—

'As the Author, in the Daily Post of Yesterday, hath falsely insinuated, that I, N. Prevost, had without Leave, Printed the said Poem, and therein Six bad and insignificant low Lines, not the Author's, instead of Six other bolder and stronger Lines in the Author's Edition! This is to give Notice, that I will produce to any Person of Honour not only the Author's Permission in Writing to Mr. Coderc, to print the above said Edition, and Mr. Coderc's Assignment of that Permission to me, but also several Copies of the Author's own Edition in England, wherein are Printed those very Six bad and insignificant low Lines: And as [to] the Author's boasted six other stronger and bolder Lines, I assure the Publick, that they are retained in the Edition Printed for me; and every Reader is left to judge, whether such Edition is less correct than the Author's own Edition.'

Voltaire, in answer to this 'abusive advertisement,' retorted that he had strictly charged Coderc to

cancel all the sheets in which these six poor lines were printed. 'If he has not executed my strict Orders in that, I will call him to an Account for every Subscriber ought to have my Book entire.'

It is exceedingly probable that this war of words was nothing more than a sham fight. Voltaire, who was already an adept in the trickeries and mystifications of publishing, would know that a hot controversy between poet and publisher carried on in all the publicity of the daily newspapers would give very effective advertisement to his new work. If, on the other hand, the quarrel was a genuine one, it did not last long. In the month of May a final paragraph appeared, announcing that Voltaire and Prevost were reconciled and that each of them withdrew his charges against the other. In a new edition Prevost managed to surmount the terrible difficulty of the six spurious lines, and Voltaire bestowed on him a word of public approbation.[1]

To one of the various London editions of the *Henriade* a French Protestant refugee appended some critical observations which much amused Voltaire. The anonymous critic, who wrote in the character of an English nobleman, was both angry with Voltaire for choosing as his hero a sovereign who had accepted Catholicism, and vexed because Voltaire said nothing to exalt the Protestant over the Roman Catholic form

[1] *The Daily Post*, May 30, 1728.

of faith. How could it be, burst out this angry critic, that a man who seemed to hold such noble and wise ideas about the Deity should have written a poem in honour of Popery, and in praise of a hero who had turned Papist for reasons of base self-interest? So blindly angry was this poor French Protestant that he declared the *Henriade* to be a work against the Protestant religion! 'M. de Voltaire arrives in our island with a book against our religion. He is received with open arms; the King and the Queen send him presents; the nobility eagerly assist the publication of his book; from the highest to the lowest, all is rivalry to receive him well'—and yet Henry IV. is a Roman Catholic and Voltaire has not a word to say against it! Bestowing a few complimentary flourishes on Voltaire personally, the writer concludes with the ridiculous wish that Voltaire should stay in England and publish a new and less Papist edition of his epic.

Voltaire was exceedingly diverted to see himself charged with excessive partiality for Roman Catholicism. But he was a little annoyed when some of his duller French readers assumed that he himself was the author of the criticism. He mentioned it in one of his English letters to Thieriot: 'The silly criticism, which is prefixed to one of the editions I have sent to you, is written by one Faget, an enthusiastic refugee, who knows neither good English nor French. I hear some of your impertinent wits in

Paris have fathered it upon me.'[1] In another letter to the same friend Voltaire returned to the subject and to the *Henriade* in general:—

'You speak to me about this miserable criticism on my poem. The author is a refugee well known in London, and he fully admits the authorship. Paris is the only place in the world where I could have been suspected of having written such rubbish; but *Odi profanum vulgus et arceo*; and the stupid judgments and foolish opinions of the vulgar will never distress a man who knows what it is to endure real misfortunes. The man who scorns the great may well scorn fools. . . .

'You tell me that the saints, who are either insincere or very foolish, find fault with me for having dared, in a poem which is by no means merely a toy or a pretty story, to represent God as a Being full of goodness, and indulgent to the follies of the human race. Poor creatures of that kind may make their God a tyrant to their hearts' content; but none the less I shall consider Him as being as good and as wise as these persons are foolish and wicked.'[2]

There are still some other, though much slighter, works which testify to Voltaire's literary activity in England. Under the influence of Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar* he began at least to outline the tragedy which in 1731 was finished as *La Mort de César*, though it was not played till many years later. In this drama

[1] *Works*, xxxiii. 179. April 21, 1728.
[2] *Id.* p. 181. August 4, 1728. The original is in French.

Voltaire imitated and improved on Shakespeare, as Condorcet quaintly remarks. He had already translated directly from Shakespeare the scene in which Antony harangues the Roman people. But Voltaire, who of course found that Shakespeare's play as a whole was 'monstrous,' considered it impossible to translate it all. He therefore composed his own piece in, as he rather curiously says, 'the English taste.' He seriously thought that his tragedy was a revelation of the genius and the character of English writers as well as of the genius of the Roman people. In Voltaire's piece, which turns entirely on the supposition that Brutus was Cæsar's son, there is little or nothing which could persuade the English reader to fancy that it is written 'in the English taste.'

Voltaire in London was also at work on a French version of his Essay on Epic Poetry. While Voltaire was still in England his original English Essay appeared in a French translation, but a translation so blundering and inefficient that Voltaire loudly complained of it. Voltaire's own French version was not at all merely a French translation of his original work. Writing from Wandsworth to Thieriot he says: 'I told you already, and I desire you to apprize your friends of it, that the English Essay was but the sketch of a very serious work which I have almost finished in French, with all the care, the liberty, and the impartiality I am capable of.'[1] Considerable

[1] *Works*, xxxiii. 172. Voltaire's English Essay did not appear

parts, indeed, of Voltaire's *Essai sur la Poésie épique* are direct translations from his English work; but the whole is much expanded, and the French is perhaps twice the size of the English composition. Among the additions is one interesting sentence in which Voltaire admits that France, at least before she possessed the *Henriade*, was without an Epic poem. 'We have had,' says Voltaire, 'no Epic poem in France, and I do not know if we yet have one. The *Henriade*, indeed, has often been printed; but it would be presumptuous to think of this poem as a work which is certain to go down to posterity, and to remove the shame which for so long a period has been the reproach of France.'[1]

The reflections and criticisms on some passages of Pascal, which stand in Voltaire's works as *Remarques (premières) sur les Pensées de Pascal*, are also said to have been written at Wandsworth, and the year 1728 is assigned to them on the authority of a note by Voltaire himself. Voltaire, desiring to take the part of humanity against a writer whom he called a 'sublime misanthrope,' wished to assert that men were neither so wicked nor so unhappy as Pascal declared them to be. It happened that while Voltaire was once reading a reflection in which Pascal dwelt on the

till the end of 1727, and the translation which was published at Paris was of course later. Yet this letter in which Voltaire complains of this bad translation is dated by the editors June 14, 1727.

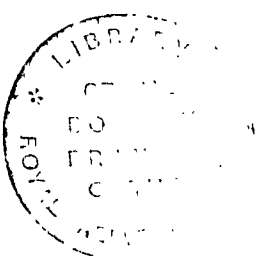
[1] *Works*, viii. 360.

blindness, the misery, the ignorance of man, he received from his friend Falkener a letter in which that happily-situated and happily-minded merchant spoke of the cheerfulness and contentedness of his lot. The contrast so struck Voltaire that in his remarks on Pascal he quoted Falkener's pleasant sentence, and added that its writer was one of his friends living in a distant country. In 1739 Voltaire appended an explanatory note, in which he says that Falkener's letter was written in 1728. But as Falkener and Voltaire were in London together in 1728, Voltaire could hardly have spoken of a letter received from Falkener in that year as the letter of a distant friend. Falkener's letter must have been one which Voltaire received after his return to France, and therefore Voltaire was occupied with his *Remarks* on Pascal at least as late as 1729. Of course, it is quite possible that Voltaire really wrote his *Remarks* in England, and, in his usual way, revised and enlarged them at a later period. In 1734, in which year the *Lettres Philosophiques* first appeared in French, the *Remarks* formed the twenty-fifth Letter. At whatever date they may have been written, Voltaire was pleased in later years to trace the almost exact similarity between a couplet in the *Essay on Man* and a sentence in his own Reflections on Pascal. Pope wrote :—

> Presumptuous man ! the reason wouldst thou find,
> Why form'd so weak, so little, and so blind ?
> First, if thou canst, the harder reason guess,
> Why form'd no weaker, blinder, and no less ?

The first epistle of Pope's poem appeared in 1733, and Voltaire assigns a date earlier by five years to the composition in which he had written: 'You wonder that God has made man so limited, so ignorant, so unhappy; why do you not wonder that He has not made us more limited, more ignorant, more unhappy?' 'I was flattered, I confess,' says Voltaire in an additional sentence in one of the later editions of the *Lettres Philosophiques*, 'to see that Pope agreed with me in something I had said many years ago . . . When a Frenchman and an Englishman think alike, they certainly must be right.'[1]

[1] *Works*, xxii. 178.



CHAPTER VII

VOLTAIRE ON ENGLISH LIFE AND LITERATURE

No traveller ever visited a foreign country with more insatiable curiosity than Voltaire brought with him to England. Nothing escaped his eager investigation. He went with equal willingness to Court and to a Quakers' meeting; he passed from Congreve's Comedies to Newton's *Principia*. The student of Bacon and Locke familiarised himself with the lightest productions of English *belles-lettres*. At one moment he was intent on Shakespeare and tragedy; at the next, on Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and inoculation against the small-pox. Voltaire was no sportsman, yet he attended the races at Newmarket and did not feel at all edified by what he saw. Writing from England to a friend in France, he sketched the kind of life which a foreigner who really wished to know England should lead, and his sketch in this instance is drawn from the life: 'No one could so well give you information as a private person with leisure and perseverance enough to learn to speak English; who should talk freely with both Whigs and Tories; should dine with a Bishop and sup with a Quaker;

should go on Saturday to a Synagogue and on Sunday to St. Paul's; should hear a sermon in the morning and see a comedy after dinner; should go from Court to the Exchange, and who, more than all this, should not allow himself to be repulsed by the coldness and the icy and disdainful airs with which the English ladies begin every new acquaintanceship, and from which some of them never get free.'[1]

Voltaire's early-formed intention of writing for the French an account of his English impressions led him to press his inquiries with a systematic seriousness of which the Preface to his English Essays gives ample proof:—

'I am ordered to give an Account of my Journey into England. Such an Undertaking can no more be attempted without understanding the Language, than a Scheme of Astronomy could be laid without the help of Mathematicks. And I have not a mind to imitate the late Mr. Sorbieres, who having stayed three Months in this Country without knowing any thing either of its Manners or of its Language, thought fit to print a Relation which proved but a dull scurrilous Satyr (*sic*) upon a Nation he knew nothing of.

'Our European Travellers for the most part are satyrical upon their neighbouring Countries, and bestow large Praises upon the Persians and Chinese; it being too natural to revile those who stand in Competition with us, and to extol those who being far remote from us, are out of the reach of Envy.

[1] *Works*, xxii. 18.

'The true Aim of a Relation is to instruct Men, not to gratify their Malice. We should be busied chiefly in giving faithful Accounts of all the useful Things and of the extraordinary Persons, whom to know, and to imitate, would be a Benefit to our Countrymen. A Traveller who writes in that Spirit, is a Merchant of a nobler Kind, who imports into his native Country the Arts and Virtues of other Nations.

'I will leave to others the Care of describing with Accuracy Paul's Church, the Monument, Westminster, Stonehenge, etc. I consider England in another View; it strikes my Eyes as it is the Land which hath produced a Newton, a Locke, a Tillotson, a Milton, a Boyle, and many great Men either dead or alive, whose Glory in War, in State-Affairs, or in Letters, will not be confined to the Bounds of this Island.

'Whosoever had the Honour and the Happiness to be acquainted with any of them, and will do me the favour to let me know some notable (though perhaps not enough known) Passages of their Lives, will confer an Obligation not only upon me, but upon the Publick.

'Likewise if there are any new Inventions or Undertakings, which have obtained or deserved Success, I shall be obliged to those who will be so kind as to give me any Information of that nature. And shall either quote my Authors, or observe a religious Silence, according as they think it proper.'

A Frenchman who arrives in London, says Voltaire in his *Lettres Philosophiques*, finds himself in a

world where everything is strange to him. The most interesting of Voltaire's comments on the numberless novelties which England offered him are on the literature and thought of the country. But he had a quick eye also for the external manners of private and public life. The same independent liberty which so astonished Voltaire in English literature delighted him in English life, and the individuality and eccentricity amused him in the life as much as they displeased him in the literature. He was diverted by the oddnesses and strange ways of Englishmen, who always seem to foreigners a little mad. In one of his English letters to an unnamed friend he says:—'I heartily wish to see you and my friends, but I had rather to see them in England than in France. You, who are a perfect Briton, you should cross the Channel to come to us. I assure you again, that a man of your temper would not dislike a country where one obeys to the laws only and to one's whims. Reason is free here and walks her own way. Hypochondriacs especially are welcome. No manner of living appears strange. We have men who walk six miles a day for their health, feed upon roots, never taste flesh, wear a coat in winter thinner than your ladies do in the hottest days: all that is accounted a particular reason, but taxed with folly by nobody.'[1] But Voltaire soon found that

[1] *Works*, xxxiii. 162. The date is probably some time in 1728.

there were limits to the personal freedom of the subject even in England:—

'One day I was in a boat on the Thames, and one of my oarsmen, seeing I was a Frenchman, began in a proud way to boast to me about the liberty of his country and said to me, with an oath, that he would rather be a boatman on the Thames than an Archbishop in France. Next day I happened to pass a prison, and I saw the very same man in it; there were irons on his feet, and through the bars he was holding out his hand to the passers-by. I asked him if he still thought so poorly of Archbishops in France, and he recognised me. Ah! sir, what an abominable Government ours is! I have been seized by main force to go and serve on one of the King's Ships in Norway; I have been torn away from my wife and children, and, for fear that I should take to flight, I have been thrown into prison, with irons on my feet, till the day I shall have to embark.

'The man's misfortune, and such a crying injustice, sensibly affected me. A Frenchman who was with me confessed that he felt a malicious joy to see that the English, who are so loud in their reproaches of our servitude, were just as much slaves as ourselves. But I had a more humane feeling. I was distressed that there was not more liberty on the earth.'[1]

Voltaire allowed himself free criticism on England and things English, but it was generally criticism of a kindly nature. He always recognised that England

[1] *Works*, xxii. 22.

had received him with much generosity, and 'never,' he wrote in English three years after he had returned to France, 'would I utter a single word that could be shocking to a free and generous nation which I admire, which I regret, and to whom I am indebted.' [1] There were occasions when he thought it not unlikely that England might a second time be his place of asylum. He even thought that he was born to live in England. His secretary Wagnière, alluding to Voltaire's hatred of intolerant and fanatical priests, one day asked him what he would have done if he had been born in Spain. Voltaire replied: 'I would have had a large rosary, I would have gone to mass every day, I would have kissed the monks' sleeves, and I would have tried to set all their convents on fire. I was not made to live in Spain, nor even in France.' 'Where then?' asked Wagnière. 'In England.' [2]

It does not appear that Voltaire ever much interested himself in English politics. As the *Lettres Philosophiques* show, he did, if it was only in a very superficial way, make some examination into the English constitution and form of government. If he appreciated the comparative political freedom, he was very unfavourably impressed by what seems an inevitable element in its working. He was astonished at some of the effects of government by party. He

[1] *Works*, xxxiii. 264. To Thieriot; May 13, 1732.
[2] Longchamp and Wagnière's *Mémoires sur Voltaire*, i. 45.

heard Tories say that Marlborough was a coward, and Whigs say that Pope was a fool. In *Candide*, Pococurante asserts that in England party-spirit spoils all that is valuable in liberty. Indeed, Voltaire seems to have seen nothing but the bad side of party government. Long afterwards, when in 1764 he was reviewing the second edition of Hume's History of England and praising its impartiality, he wrote that the fury of parties had for a long time deprived England of a good History, as it had also deprived the country of a good government. But Voltaire's casual expressions on politics are not worth much. He had no settled or seriously considered political views. One may be full of righteous indignation against tyranny and bigotry, and yet have no reasoned theory of what should constitute a good government. If Voltaire would have preferred one form of government to another, he probably would have liked best an enlightened and good-natured despotism.

In the refinements of social life and in happy gracefulness of social manners Voltaire could not help thinking that the English were far behind the French. 'Let us,' he once wrote to a French friend, 'compare Paris and London. London is the rival of Paris in point of size, but by no means its rival in splendour, in taste, in sumptuosity, in exquisite conveniences, in amusements, in the fine arts, and above all in the art of society. I am not at all afraid of being wrong when I say that there is five hundred times more

silver plate in the houses of the citizens of Paris than in those of the citizens of London. Your notary, your attorney, your woollen-draper are much better housed, have much better furniture, and are much better served than a magistrate of the first city of England. More poultry and game are consumed in Paris in a single evening than in London in a week, and Paris burns perhaps a thousand times more wax-candles; for in London, except in the Court quarter, nothing is burnt but tallow.'[1] It seemed also to Voltaire that the happy freedom of the Englishman's life and thought was without the charm of attractive amiableness. The English, he said, had the art of thinking, but the French knew the art of pleasing. Chesterfield, said Voltaire, was the only Englishman who had recommended the art of pleasing as the first duty of life[2]; and elsewhere he says that of all the arts the art of pleasing is the one which the English cultivate least. He could not help noticing a sort of brutality in the race, and he had this characteristic in mind when once in conversation on the History of England he burst out: 'The hangman should be their historian, for he has usually settled their disputes.' He noticed, too, a misanthropic melancholy in the nation, a melancholy which made the English unsocial and repellent. There might

[1] *Works*, xxiii. 306.

[2] *Id.* xlix. 62. Voltaire is referring to Chesterfield's *Letters* to his son.

be no hypocrites, no Tartufes in London, but there certainly were plenty of Timons. Writing of some Englishmen who were at Lunéville when he himself was also there in 1735, Voltaire slily quoted a rumour that they had become so far humanised and civilised as actually to talk. The English, he said, did not understand delicate pleasantry; soft music was not made for them; they needed drums and trumpets. Indeed, it is tolerably clear that while Voltaire looked with admiring envy on English liberty and English toleration, he found more to repel than to attract him in the personal characteristics of the average Englishman. Thirty years after he had left England he wrote to the Marquise du Deffant that the only things he liked in the English were their writings on philosophy and some of their daring poetry. In 1760 he wrote again to the same friend: 'I have my plough, and English books, for I have as much liking for the books of the English nation as I have little liking for their persons. Englishmen, for the most part, have no worth except for themselves. Very few of them are like Bolingbroke. He was worth more than his books; but as for the rest of the English, their books are worth more than themselves.' But his criticism was all good-humoured enough, as good-humoured as when he compared the English nation to a hogshead of their own strong beer, the top of it froth, the bottom dregs, and the middle excellent. In 1738 he wrote to a French friend who had been in England:—

'I cannot doubt that you have already strengthened your genius by the study of a language in which the most vigorous of all known thought is written. You must have felt your soul more free and more at its ease in London; for it is in London that nature displays masculine beauties which owe nothing to art. The graces, precision, sweetness, refined delicacy are more the share of the French. *Utraque poscit opem res et conjurat amice.* I believe that an Englishman who knows France well, and a Frenchman who knows England well, are both very much the better for it.'

In one social matter at least Voltaire thought England contrasted favourably with France. Voltaire had no sympathy with the contempt bestowed by the high world of French birth and exclusiveness upon the prosperous merchants who enriched their country by their enterprise and commerce. When two or three years after he left England, Voltaire dedicated one of his plays to his friend the English merchant Falkener, he did what seemed to the Parisian world an inconceivably daring thing. But he did it purposely. He dedicated the piece to Falkener not only as a fellow-lover of literature and an intimate friend, but also as an English merchant. 'It is a pleasure to me,' he says, 'to be able to let my country know the regard paid by England to her merchants, the esteem which England has for a profession which makes the greatness of the State, and the distinction with which some of your class represent their country

in Parliament and sit among the legislators of the land.' In his *Lettres Philosophiques* Voltaire gave expression to the same feeling:—

'The younger son of a peer of the realm does not scorn to engage in trade. Lord Townshend, one of the ministers, has a brother who is quite content to be a merchant in the City. While Lord Oxford governed England his younger son was an agent at Aleppo. He had no wish to leave Aleppo, and he died there. . . .

'In France . . . the merchant hears his profession so disdainfully spoken of that he is foolish enough to blush for it. Yet I do not know which is the more useful to the State, a well powdered Lord who knows to a moment the hour at which the King rises and at which he goes to bed, and who gives himself grand airs while he is really playing the part of a slave in a minister's ante-chamber, or a merchant who is enriching his country, who gives from his office orders for Surat and for Cairo, and who contributes to the happiness of the world.' [1]

Nothing in his survey of English life so surprised Voltaire as the number of the existing English religious sects and the general toleration which they commonly received from the Government. He was also struck by the usually correct manners of the clergy. It was when he was reflecting on the learning, the propriety, and the regular married life of the English clergy that he once said: 'I confess that I

[1] *Works*, xxii. 111.

am jealous when I throw my eyes upon England.' The contrast was indeed striking:—

'The English clergy are more regular in their lives than French ecclesiastics. The reason is this: English clergymen are all educated at Oxford or Cambridge, far away from the corruption of the capital; it is very late before they can reach the dignities of the Church, and by that time men—unless they are nourished by ambition—have no other passion than avarice. In England, both in the Church and in the Army, dignified posts are the reward of long service; there are no juvenile Bishops or school-boy colonels here. More than this, the clergy are nearly all married men. They contract awkward manners at the University, and opportunities for intrigue are few in England: so that as a usual thing a Bishop is perforce content with his own wife. Clergymen sometimes go to taverns, for custom allows it; and if they get intoxicated, they do so in a serious way which causes no scandal.

'That undefinable being, neither ecclesiastic nor secular, in a word, the man whom we call an *abbé*, is an unknown species in England. When an Englishman is told that in France young men who are notorious for their debaucheries and who have been raised to the prelacy by women's intrigues, openly make love, divert themselves by composing amorous songs, give dainty and prolonged suppers every night, and then go to implore the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and boldly call themselves the successors of the Apostles, he thanks God that he is a Protestant.'

Voltaire threw at least a superficial glance over all the English sects. 'England is the country of sects,' he says. 'An Englishman, like a free man, goes to Heaven by the road he likes best.' With his untiring curiosity, Voltaire did not omit even the Quakers, and he has left a very lightly-touched account of a visit which he paid to one of the leading Friends in London. This was one Andrew Pitt, a retired merchant, living in pleasant retreat at Hampstead. Voltaire had a conversation with him on baptism and other ecclesiastical matters, and promised to read Robert Barclay's famous *Apology*. A favourable allusion which Voltaire makes to Barclay's book seems to show that he kept his promise. The polite old Quaker Pitt took Voltaire one Sunday to a Meeting-House near the Monument, not, it seems, very much to Voltaire's edification. He made himself, however, well acquainted with the lives of Fox and Penn, and devoted four of his *Lettres Philosophiques* exclusively to Quakerism and the Quakers. In these same *Lettres* Voltaire has his word, though a very slight and superficial one, to say about the Church of England and its bishops, the Arians and Dr. Clarke, the Presbyterians and the cheerless English Sunday. 'If there was only one religion in England, it would be a despotism and dangerous; if there were only two, they would cut each other's throat; but there are thirty, and they live in peace and happiness.' Thirty religions and one sauce, as Voltaire elsewhere once said of England.

On the literary side, also, Voltaire found that in one respect at least things were managed better in England than in France. He was perfectly amazed at the respect and honour paid to men of letters in England. 'Literature is more honoured in England than in France,' he wrote. He even went so far as to say that in France literature was not really loved.[1] But in England he found men of rank, Dorset, Roscommon, Halifax and others, cultivating literature themselves as if their fortune had depended upon it, and patronising letters in others. He could not help contrasting England with his own country:—

'In France, Addison would have been a member of some Academy, and might have got, through some lady's influence, a pension of twelve hundred *livres*; or more probably he would have found himself in a scrape, and it would have been pretended that his *Cato* contained some strokes against the porter of someone in office. In England, he was Secretary of State. Newton was Master of the Mint; Congreve held an important appointment; Prior was a plenipotentiary; Dr. Swift is an Irish Dean, and is made much more of in Ireland than the Primate himself. If Pope's religion does not allow him to have any official employment, it does not hinder his translation of Homer from bringing him in two hundred thousand francs. In France, I have seen the author of *Rhadamiste* [Crébillon *aîné*] almost dying of hunger; the son of one of the greatest of Frenchmen, himself

[1] *Sottisier*, 128.

beginning to follow the footsteps of his father, would have been reduced to wretchedness but for M. Fagon. Nothing so much encourages English men of letters as the consideration which is shown to them. The Prime Minister's portrait is on the wall of his own study; but in twenty houses I have seen the portrait of Pope.

'Newton was honoured as he deserved to be both in his life-time and after his death. The chief men of the nation contended for the honour of bearing the pall at his funeral. Go into Westminster Abbey; admiration is not paid to the tombs of the kings, but to the monuments which the gratitude of the nation has erected to the greatest men who have contributed to its glory. Their statues are to be seen there like those of the Sophocles and the Platos at Athens; and I am convinced that the mere sight of these glorious monuments has stimulated more than one spirit and has formed more than one great man.

'England has even been reproached with paying excessive honours to simple merit, and fault has been found because the celebrated comic actress Mrs. Oldfield was buried in Westminster Abbey with almost the same honours as were paid to Newton. It has even been pretended that this great honour was paid to the memory of the actress in order to make the French all the more sensible of the reproach they earned when, with barbarous and dastardly injustice, they flung upon the laystall the corpse of Mademoiselle Lecouvreur.

'But I can assure you that in the obsequies of Mrs. Oldfield, who is buried in the English Saint-

Denis, the English only consulted their taste; they are very far from throwing infamy upon the art of Sophocles and Euripides, and from excluding from the rights of citizenship those who devote themselves to declaim before them the works which are the boast of their nation.

These two events, the honourable burial in the Abbey of a philosopher and of an actress, struck Voltaire as much as anything else he saw in England. In March 1727, Voltaire was present at the funeral of Newton, whose pall was borne by the Lord Chancellor, by Dukes, and by Earls. And when he saw the respectful sympathy with which the remains of Mrs. Oldfield were admitted to the Abbey, he could not help thinking of the miserable and inhuman treatment which fell to the lot of his admired friend Mademoiselle Lecouvreur after her death. He never wearies of drawing this particular contrast:—

'It is true . . . that the beautiful Oldfield, the first comedy-actress of England, has a beautiful tomb in Westminster Abbey, as have the Kings and heroes of the country, and even the great Newton. It is also true that Mademoiselle Lecouvreur, the first French actress of her time, was taken in a cab to the corner of the Rue de Bourgogne, which was not yet paved, was buried there by a street porter, and has no tomb at all. There are all kinds in this world. The English have established a yearly festival in honour of the

[1] *Works*, xxii. 179.

famous player-poet Shakespeare. We in France have not yet any festival in honour of Molière.'[1]

Voltaire returned to his theme in his dedication of *Zaïre* to Falkener :—

'You English have no need to ask if the King approves when you wish to honour and reward great talents in whatever department. Sir Richard Steele and Sir John Wanbruck [Vanbrugh !] were at the same time writers of comedies and members of Parliament. Dr. Tillotson's primacy, Prior's embassy, Newton's official post, Addison's secretaryship of State, are only the usual results of the consideration you show to great men. You load them with kindnesses during their life,[2] you raise them tombs and statues after their death ; even your celebrated actresses find their place in your churches beside your great poets :

Votre Oldfield et sa devancière
Bracegirdle la minaudière,
Pour avoir su dans leurs beaux jours
Réussir au grand art de plaire,
Ayant achevé leur carrière,
S'en furent avec le concours
De votre république entière,
Sous un grand poêle de velours,
Dans votre église pour toujours
Loger en superbe manière.
Leur ombre en paraît encor fière,
Et s'en vante avec les Amours ;
Tandis que le divin Molière,
Bien plus digne d'un tel honneur,
A peine obtint le froid bonheur

[1] *Works*, xliv. 160. Written in 1765.

[2] Was Voltaire thinking of Butler, Otway, and others of that sad society ?

De dormir dans un cimetière ;
Et que l'aimable Lecouvreur,
A qui j'ai fermé la paupière,
N'a pas eu la même faveur
De deux cierges et d'une bière,
Et que monsieur de Lambinière
Porta la nuit, par charité,
Ce corps autrefois si vanté,
Dans un vieux fiacre empaqueté,
Vers le bord de notre rivière.
Voyez-vous pas à ce récit
L'Amour irrité qui gémit,
Qui s'envole en brisant ses armes,
Et Melpomène tout en larmes,
Qui m'abandonne, et se bannit
Des lieux ingrats qu'elle embellit
Si longtemps de ses nobles charmes ?'[1]

Once more this incident offered him an opportunity for a contrast between France and England :—

'Ah ! verrai-je toujours ma faible nation,
Incertaine en ses vœux, flétrir ce qu'elle admire ;
Nos mœurs avec nos lois toujours se contredire ;
Et le Français volage endormi sous l'empire
De la superstition ?
Quoi ! n'est-ce donc qu'en Angleterre
Que les mortels osent penser ?
O rivale d'Athène, ô Londre ! heureuse terre !
Ainsi que les tyrans vous avez su chasser
Les préjugés honteux qui vous livraient la guerre.
C'est là qu'on sait tout dire, et tout récompenser ;
Nul art n'est méprisé, tout succès a sa gloire.
Le vainqueur de Tallard, le fils de la victoire,
Le sublime Dryden, et le sage Addison,
Et la charmante Ophils [Oldfield], et l'immortel Newton,
Ont part au temple de mémoire :
Et Lecouvreur à Londre aurait eu des tombeaux
Parmi les beaux-esprits, les rois, et les héros.

---

[1] *Works*, ii. 543.

Quiconque a des talents à Londre est un grand homme.
L'abondance et la liberté
Ont, après deux mille ans, chez vous ressuscité
L'esprit de la Grèce et de Rome.
Des lauriers d'Apollon dans nos stériles champs
La feuille négligée est-elle donc flétrie?
Dieux! pourquoi mon pays n'est-il plus la patrie
Et de la gloire et des talents?'

Voltaire noted with admiration and envy the free course which in England literature and thought were allowed to take. He was astonished to find himself in a country where one need ask no official permission to think and speak freely. Speaking of his *Lettres Philosophiques*, which caused him so much vexation and persecution in France, he wrote:—'Judge of the difference which exists between the English and the French. To readers in London these *Letters* appeared chiefly philosophical; but in Paris, where they have not yet made their appearance, they are already styled impious.'[1] And again on the same subject:—'I am obliged to alter all I had written about Locke, because, after all, I wish to live in France, and I am not allowed to be as philosophical as an Englishman. I must disguise at Paris what I could not say too strongly in London. This unfortunate, but necessary, circumspection compels me to cancel more than one piquant passage on the Quakers and the Presbyterians.'[2] It was only at London, Voltaire long afterwards observed, that poets could be also philosophers. He was

[1] *Works*, xxxiii. 379. September 14, 1733.
[2] *Id.* 307. November, 1732.

not even allowed to publish his *Charles the Twelfth* at Paris, and he bursts out to his friend Thieriot: 'I join my feeble voice to all the voices of England in pointing out the difference which exists between their liberty and our servitude, between their wise boldness and our foolish superstition, between the encouragement given to the arts in London and the shameful oppression under which they languish at Paris.'[1] So harmless a thing as Voltaire's Essay on Epic Poetry was proscribed in France, and he repeatedly dwells upon the difference between England and France in the matter of literary liberty. One short specimen will be enough:—

'Liberty of thought is the life of the soul. . . . It is a great misfortune that there are so few French imitators of the example of our neighbours the English. We have been obliged to adopt their physical science, to imitate their financial system, to build our ships on their plan; when shall we imitate them in the noble liberty of allowing the mind to take all the flight of which it is capable? When will the foolish cease to attack the wise? At Paris we are for ever walking among literary insects which buzz against every rising reputation, and screech-owls which would like to devour everyone who shows them the light. Happy the man who can cultivate letters in peace, far from the buzzings and the screech-owls!'[2]

[1] *Works*, xxxiii. 212. May 1, 1731.
[2] *Id.* xxxvii. 567. Undated; before March, 1753.

Voltaire was always, and not altogether unjustly, inclined to insist on the part he had taken in introducing English literature into France. He liked to enumerate the names of the English poets from Milton to Pope from whose works he had translated, and of the English philosophers, Bacon, Newton, Locke, whose teaching he had made known to his own fellow-countrymen. Scattered criticisms on these and on very many other English writers occur in numerous passages of Voltaire's works and correspondence. But by far the largest part of Voltaire's English literary criticism is concerned with the drama.

On English tragedy in general, the views to which Voltaire gave early expression in the *Lettres Philosophiques* were those which he continued to hold all through his life. English tragedy, he there said, was only excellent in detached portions; the plays themselves, though there were wonderful flashes of light in the midst of their general darkness, were nearly all barbarous, destitute of propriety, of order, of probability. Their style was too high-flown and bombastic, too unnatural, too much an imitation of the Asiatic turgidity of the Hebrew writers. With slight variation of expression, this is the general burden of Voltaire's reflections on English tragedy. But when he is dealing with individual writers, and especially when he is dealing with Shakespeare, Voltaire's criticisms are often inconsistent and not unfrequently contradictory.

In the Preface to his English Essays, Voltaire announced that to him England was the land of Newton, Locke, Tillotson, Milton, Boyle. He did not add the name of Shakespeare; but his writings abound with references to Shakespeare, and to the modern reader Voltaire's Shakespearian criticisms and fault-findings are not the least amusing parts of his works. It is only fair to remember that among Voltaire's English contemporaries there were many critics and men of taste who spoke of Shakespeare very much as Voltaire himself spoke. Five years before Voltaire's arrival in England, the English dramatist and critic, Gildon, had written:—

'That famous soliloquy which has been so much cried up in *Hamlet* has no more to do there than a description of the grove and altar of Diana mentioned by Horace. Hamlet comes in talking to himself, and very sedately and exactly weighs the several reasons or considerations mentioned in that soliloquy,

To be, or not to be, &c.

As soon as he has done talking to himself, he sees Ophelia, and passes to a conversation with her, entirely different to (*sic*) the subject he has been meditating on with that earnestness, which, as it was produced by nothing before, so has it no manner of influence on what follows after, and is therefore a perfectly detached piece, and has nothing to do in the play. The long and tedious soliloquy of the bastard Falconbridge, in the play of *King John*, just after his being received as the natural son of Cœur de Lion, is

not only impertinent to the play, but extremely ridiculous. To go through all the soliloquies of Shakespeare would be to make a volume on this single head. But this I can say in general, that there is not one in all his works that can be excused by nature or reason.'[1]

Though Pope's edition of Shakespeare consisted of only seven hundred and fifty copies, the price had to be very much reduced before that small number of copies could be sold. Addison, in his early verses on the greatest English poets, did not include the name of Shakespeare at all. Swift knew so little of Shakespeare—and of Chaucer—as to think that the Wife of Bath was one of Shakespeare's characters. 'I have heard of the Wife of Bath, I think in Shakespeare,' writes Swift to Gay.[2] When the leading London booksellers asked Johnson to supply them with biographical matter for an edition of the Works of the English poets, they took it for granted that English poetry began with Cowley, and there is no life of Shakespeare in the *Lives of the English Poets*. Did not Charles James Fox tell Sir Joshua Reynolds that in his opinion Shakespeare's credit would have stood higher if he had never written *Hamlet*?[3] In the Pope and Swift and Bolingbroke circles which

[1] *The Laws of Poetry, as laid down by the Duke of Buckinghamshire, &c.*, p. 206. By Charles Gildon. 1721.

[2] Elwin's *Pope*, vii. 167. November 20, 1729.

[3] James Northcote's *Life of Sir J. Reynolds*, ii. 234 (ed. 1818). Reynolds himself told Northcote the anecdote.

Voltaire so freely frequented, he heard judgments passed on Shakespeare not very much less sweeping than his own. The superfine Bolingbroke, who was Voltaire's idol till Voltaire was able to measure him more accurately, sneered at Shakespeare in a quite Voltairian manner. Voltaire had heard Bolingbroke say that England did not possess one good tragedy, and that *Cato* was the only English tragedy well-written throughout. When English critics of repute, and Voltaire's own English friends, talked in this style, it is not surprising that a French author, imbued with the theories and traditions of the French stage, at times surpassed them in the vigour of his denunciations.

Voltaire was quite willing to admit that in some respects English dramatists had advantages which the French were without. When he returned to France after his English visit, and resumed his literary work in his own language, he felt frightened by the severity of the rules which a French poet must observe, and, above all, by the slavery which bound the French stage to rhyme. The English writer, Voltaire reflected, says whatever he wishes to say, while the French author only says what he is allowed to say.[1] In a letter to an English friend, written

[1] Voltaire, while dwelling on the greater freedom allowed to English verse, of course believed that rhyme was essential to French poetry. While he was in England, he had had some arguments on this matter with Bishop Atterbury. In the *Discourse on Tragedy* which Voltaire dedicated to Bolingbroke, he says:—'I know how

some thirty-three years after he had left England, he says:—

'Your Shakespeare was very fortunate; he could write tragedies half in prose, half in verse, and what verses! To be sure, they are not elegant and polished like Pope's, or like Addison's in *Cato*; and Shakespeare gave himself the liberty of changing the place of action almost in every scene, of heaping up thirty or forty actions one on the top of the other, of making the action of a play last for twenty-five years, and of mingling buffoonery with tragedy. In my opinion, his great merit consists in his vigorous and ingenuous portraitures of human life.

'Corneille's task was certainly more difficult. He had a constant victory to win over the difficulties of rhyme, and the difficulties here are enormous; he had to submit to the unities of time, place, and action; he could never permit an actor to enter on or leave the stage without an interesting reason for it; he had to construct his plot with art and to unravel it with reason and probability; to make all his heroes speak with a noble eloquence, and to say nothing that could

many disputes I had in England about our versification, and how the learned Bishop of Rochester often reproaches me with the childish restraint which, he says, the French quite unnecessarily impose upon themselves.' Atterbury, a High-Church Bishop, seems not to have relished being publicly mentioned by Voltaire to Bolingbroke. He wrote to his son-in-law Morice: 'Pray forget not to vindicate me, as publicly as you can, about Voltaire's mentioning me in his preface. I have done it here [Paris] myself, and so loudly that I believe he will scarcely venture to visit me any more.' (Folkestone Williams's *Memoirs of Atterbury*, ii. 424; February 5–16, 1731.) Surely Voltaire's reference was a very innocent one.

shock the delicate ears of a Court which was full of *esprit*, and of an Academy composed of men who were very learned and very hard to please.

'You will admit that Shakespeare's hands were a little more free than Corneille's. For the rest, you know my esteem for your nation; I never lose an opportunity of doing justice to England in my Commentary [on Corneille].'[1]

Voltaire was also much struck by the unconventional and vigorous action which so distinguished English plays from the frigid formality of the French stage. The most irregular English pieces, however destitute of the purity, the propriety, and the elegance of the French theatre, had yet the very noticeable merit of being interesting, of constantly holding the attention of the spectator. Voltaire thought Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar* a very ridiculous affair as a play, but he was forced to confess that he was greatly attracted by its performance:—

'There is a great share of interest in these bizarre and savage pieces. I have witnessed a performance of Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar*, and I confess that, from the very first scene, when I heard the tribune reproaching the Roman populace with its ingratitude to Pompey and its attachment to Cæsar, the conqueror of Pompey, I began to be interested, to be moved. In the course of the play, no conspirator appeared on the stage without exciting my curiosity;

[1] To George Keate; Aux Délices, February 10, 1762. In French, *Works*, xlii. 40.

and, in spite of so much ridiculous nonsense in the piece, I felt that it had an attraction for me.' [1]

And in his *Discourse* to Bolingbroke, Voltaire writes:—

'With what pleasure I saw in London the tragedy of *Julius Cæsar*, which has been the delight of your nation for a hundred and fifty years! I certainly do not pretend to approve of the barbarous irregularities with which it abounds; the only astonishing thing is that there are not more of them in a work which was composed in an ignorant age, by a man who did not even know Latin, and whose only master was his genius. But, in the midst of so many gross faults, what was my rapture to see Brutus, still holding a dagger stained with Cæsar's blood, assemble the Roman citizens, and address them from the Rostrum. . .

'After this scene, Antony comes to move to pity the very Romans whom Brutus had inspired with his own sternness and barbarity. Antony, by an artful speech, insensibly leads back these proud minds to their former feelings; and when he sees that they are softened, he shows them Cæsar's body; and by the use of the most pathetic figures he excites them to outbreak and to revenge. The French, perhaps, would not endure the appearance on their stage of a band of Roman artisans and plebeians; they would not permit that Cæsar's bleeding body should be exposed to the gaze of the people, and that the populace should be excited to vengeance from the public

[1] *Works*, vii. 485.

Rostrum. It is for custom, the queen of the world, to change the tastes of nations, and to turn into pleasure the objects which we view with aversion.' [1]

Voltaire fairly enough admitted that in this matter of real human interest the French stage was behind the English. In the French theatre beautiful dialogue took the place of action; a languid monotony and formal declamation were the cold substitutes for warmth and life and passion. In his Commentary on Corneille Voltaire confesses that of all tragic writers Shakespeare is the one who has the fewest useless scenes, the fewest scenes of mere conversation which has no vital connection with the play itself. Shakespeare breaks all the rules, says Voltaire, but he never fails to interest. If to the elegance and noble decency of the French stage could be added a happy mixture of the vigorous action of the English and Spanish theatres, Voltaire thought that the result would be dramatic perfection:—

'Would each Nation attend a little more than they do, to the Taste and the Manners of their respective Neighbours, perhaps a general good Taste might diffuse itself through all Europe from such an Intercourse of Learning, and from that useful Exchange of Observations. The English Stage, for Example, might be clear'd of mangled Carcasses, and the Style of their tragick Authors come down from their forced Metaphorical Bombast, to a nearer Imitation of

[1] *Works*, ii. 316.

Nature. The French would learn from the English to animate their Tragedies with more Action, and would contract now and then their long Speeches into shorter and warmer Sentiments.

'The Spaniards would introduce in their Plays more Pictures of human life, more Characters and Manners, and not puzzle themselves always in the Entanglements of confus'd Adventures, more romantick than natural. The Italian in point of Tragedy, would catch the flame from the English, and all the rest from the French. In point of Comedy, they would learn from Mr. Congreve and some other Authors, to prefer Wit and Humour to Buffoonery.'

But Voltaire's praises of such merits as he thought belonged to English dramatists and to English plays sound feeble beside his denunciations of English dramatic defects. However much the action and story of an English play might interest him, he was horrified whenever he critically considered the English stage. 'English plays,' he once said, 'are like English puddings: nobody has any taste for them but themselves.'[1] It seemed to Voltaire simply monstrous that carpenters and cobblers should jest and pun on the same stage which Brutus and Cassius and Cæsar trod; that grave-diggers should actually dig a grave, sing snatches of songs, and equivocate on bones and skulls; that a husband should smother his wife before the audience, as Othello smothers

[1] Spence's *Anecdotes*. Edited by S. W. Singer (1858), p. 251.

Desdemona.[1] When there was once talk of the introduction of some realistic novelty on the French scene, Voltaire burst out: 'The thing would only be in place in the hangman's quarter or on the English stage. The gallows and the executioner's men must not disgrace the theatre of Paris. Let us imitate the English in their navy, in their commerce, in their philosophy, but never in their disgusting atrocities.'

In all good faith Voltaire made what excuses he could for Shakespeare and his ways. Shakespeare, he reflected, lived in an age of ignorance; he had little education; he did not even know Latin, and had no other master than his own genius. Above all, he had not the fortune to live in the days of good-sense, of Anne, and of Addison. He was a great genius, but he lived in a coarse, rude age, and his plays were much more marked by the rude coarseness of his time than by the genius of their author. It was only surprising that he was not more barbarously irregular than he actually was. But though Voltaire was full of contemptuous disgust for Shakespeare's dramatic lawlessness, he was by no means unwilling to acknowledge such beauties as he could recognise. He constantly admits that if Shakespeare has no entire play of which French

[1] 'In time, he [Voltaire] wore off the prejudice he first conceived at the catastrophe of our English tragedy, the custom of killing upon the stage never having been introduced on the French theatre, till the *Zara* of this author, which he planned from Shakespeare's *Othello*.' Chetwood's *General History of the Stage*, 47*n*.

criticism could approve, he yet has admirable scenes. Voltaire did not like to be told that he under-rated Shakespeare, and he repeatedly insisted on what he had done to make Shakespeare known to France. 'I was the first,' says Voltaire, 'who extracted a little gold from the mud in which Shakespeare was plunged by the age in which he lived.' In a letter to Horace Walpole in 1768 Voltaire wrote :—

'You have almost made your nation believe that I despise Shakespeare. I was the first to make Shakespeare known to the French; I translated passages from him forty years ago, as well as from Milton, Waller, Rochester, Dryden, and Pope. I can assure you that before I did so no one in France knew anything about English poetry, and Locke's name had hardly been heard. For thirty years I have been persecuted by a multitude of fanatics because I said that Locke was the Hercules of metaphysics and had laid down the limits of the human understanding.

'Destiny also decreed that I should be the first to explain to my fellow-countrymen the discoveries of the great Newton. . . . I have been your apostle and your martyr, and it is really unjust that the English should complain about me. A very long time ago I said that if Shakespeare had appeared in the age of Addison he would have joined to his native genius the elegance and purity for which Addison is to be commended. I said that *his genius was his own, and that his faults were the faults of his age.* In my opinion, Shakespeare is in precisely the same case as Lope de Vega and as Calderon. A beautiful, but very wild

nature, no regularity, no propriety, no art; baseness mixed with grandeur, buffoonery with the terrible; a chaos of tragedy, but with a hundred flashes of light.

'The Italians, who restored tragedy a century before the English and the Spanish, did not fall into this fault. They were happier in their imitation of the Greeks. There are no buffoons in Sophocles' *Œdipus* and *Electra*. I strongly suspect that this coarse boorishness took its origin in our Court fools. We were all a little barbarous on this side of the Alps. Every prince was entitled to keep a *fool*. Ignorant kings, brought up by ignorant teachers, had no comprehension of the noble pleasures of the understanding; they degraded human nature so low as to pay men for talking stupidities to them. This was the origin of our *Mère sotte*. And before Molière's time almost every comedy introduced a Court fool: an abominable custom.

'It is true, Sir, that I have said, as you observe, that there are serious comedies, like *Le Misanthrope*, which are masterpieces; that there are very humourous comedies, like *George Dandin*; and that in one and the same comedy there may be a very happy harmony of humour, seriousness, and sensibility. And I have said that all kinds are good except the tiresome and boring kind. Yes; but coarse boorishness is not a kind at all. *In my Father's house there are many mansions*; but I have never thought that it was becoming to assign the same room to Charles the Fifth and to Don Japhet of Armenia, to Augustus and to an intoxicated sailor, to Marcus Aurelius and to a street buffoon. . . .

'You free Britons pay no heed to the unities of place, time, and action. And really you are none the better for your heedlessness; for probability should always be allowed to have its due weight. When the unities are observed, art becomes more difficult, and to overcome difficulties is a source of pleasure and of glory in every kind of workmanship.

'You are thoroughly English, but allow me to stand up a little for my own nation. I so often tell France the truth about herself, that it is only just that I should be kind to her when I believe that she is in the right. Yes, Sir, I have believed, I do believe, and I will believe that, as far as tragedy and comedy are concerned, Paris is far superior to Athens. I think that Molière, and even Regnard, surpass Aristophanes as much as Demosthenes surpasses our pleaders. I will boldly tell you that all the Greek tragedies seem to me the work of schoolboys in comparison with Corneille's sublime scenes and Racine's perfect tragedies. Boileau himself, in spite of his admiration for the ancients, thought so too. He found no difficulty in writing below Racine's portrait that that great man surpassed Euripides and equalled Corneille.

'Yes, I think I could prove that there are many more men of taste in Paris than there were at Athens. We have more than thirty thousand in Paris who delight in the fine arts, and at Athens there were not ten thousand. Then the common populace of Athens was admitted to the theatre, but it is not so with us, except when on solemn or popular occasions free performances are given. And our constant connection

with ladies' society has given us much more delicacy in our sentiments and propriety in our manners. Leave us our theatre, and leave to the Italians their *favole boscareccie*; you English are rich enough in other departments. . . .

'I must add just a word on rhyme. You make it a reproach to us. Nearly all Dryden's plays are rhymed, and to write in rhyme is more difficult than to do without it. The lines of Dryden which are remembered and universally quoted are in rhyme; and I maintain further that, as *Cinna, Athalie, Phèdre, Iphigénie*, are rhymed, if any Frenchman wished to shake off this yoke, he would be regarded as a feeble artist, unable to bear rhyme's weight.

'As I am an old man, I have a right to tell you an anecdote. One day I asked Pope why Milton, at a time when other poets, in imitation of the Italians, wrote in rhyme, had not rhymed his Epic. Pope's answer was: *Because he could not.*' [1]

One or two of Voltaire's countless criticisms on Shakespeare will illustrate his method of assigning alternate praise and blame:—

'Shakespeare is a man of genius. The Italians, the French, and men of letters of all countries who have not passed some time in England, take him for a mere mountebank of the fair, a droll far below harlequin, the sorriest buffoon who ever amused the mob. And yet in this same man there are passages which

[1] *Works*, xlvi. 78. July 15, 1768. Voltaire was fond of repeating this anecdote, but it is difficult to believe that Pope ever said anything of the kind.

exalt the imagination and penetrate the heart. Truth and Nature themselves speak their own language without any mixture of art. He reaches sublimity without having searched for it. . . .

'What are we to conclude from this contrast of grandeur and meanness, of sublime reason and gross foolery, and, in short, from all the contrasts that we find in Shakespeare? That he would have been a perfect poet if he had lived in the time of Addison.' [1]

Elsewhere Voltaire says that Shakespeare was a mixture of grandeur and of extravagance, sometimes a model worthy of Corneille and sometimes working for Bedlam, giving himself up to the most brutal folly and perfectly aware that he was doing so. And yet, barbarous, low, extravagant and absurd as he was, there were sparkles of genius in him. 'In this obscure chaos of murders and of buffooneries, of heroism and of baseness, of Billingsgate and of the grand style, there are strokes which are natural and striking.' The classic passage of Voltaire's Shakespearian criticism is that in which the 'drunken savage' theory appears, and it will serve for quotation as well as any other :—

'I am certainly very far from justifying the tragedy of *Hamlet* as a whole; it is a coarse and barbarous piece which would not be endured by the lowest of the populace of France or Italy. Hamlet becomes mad in the second act, and his mistress becomes mad in the third; the Prince, pretending to

[1] *Works*, xvii. 402.

kill a rat, kills the father of his mistress, and the heroine throws herself into the river. Her grave is dug on the stage; grave-diggers make puns worthy of them, holding death's-heads in their hands; and Prince Hamlet replies to their abominable coarsenesses by no less disgusting extravagances. Meanwhile one of the actors conquers Poland. Hamlet, his mother, and his step-father drink together on the stage; at table there is singing and quarrelling, fighting and killing. It would seem that such a work is the fruit of the imagination of a drunken savage. But amid these gross irregularities, which even to the present day make the English stage so absurd and barbarous, this play of *Hamlet*, by a still greater whimsicality, has sublime touches worthy of the greatest genius. It seems that nature took pleasure in bringing together in Shakespeare's head the strongest and grandest imagination with the lowest and most detestable of dull grossness.

'But there are beauties shining in the midst of these terrible extravagances, and it must be admitted that the ghost of Hamlet's father is one of the most striking of theatrical effects. The English, even the most educated and those who feel most the lawlessness of the early English stage, are always greatly impressed by it. In the mere reading of the play this ghost inspires more terror than the apparition of Darius in the *Persæ* of Æschylus. And why? Because, in Æschylus, Darius only appears to denounce the misfortunes of his family; while in Shakespeare, the ghost of Hamlet's father comes to reveal secret crimes and to demand vengeance. It is not dragged

in uselessly and by force; it gives strength to our conviction that there is an invisible power which is the master of nature. Men all have a store of justice in their heart, and they naturally wish that heaven should take care to avenge innocence. In every time and in every country men will be glad to see that there is a Supreme Being who punishes the crimes of those whom men themselves cannot call to judgment. For this thought is a consolation to the weak, and a check on the wicked in high places.' [1]

Voltaire's vocabulary of Shakespearian abuse is varied and extensive. Shakespeare was 'the London Corneille, and a great fool into the bargain,' 'that drunkard of a Shakespeare,' 'this abominable Shakespeare,' 'this village clown who has not written two decent lines.' Voltaire's favourite epithet for Shakespeare was 'savage.' Shakespeare was 'a savage who had imagination,' 'a savage, with flashes of genius shining in a horrible night,' 'a drunken savage.' Voltaire translated into French the first acts of *Julius Cæsar*, and called them the grossest extravagance, less reasonable than the rant of the play-booths at the fair. Of Shakespeare's thorough inferiority to the French dramatists Voltaire had no manner of doubt. He was ashamed to mention Shakespeare and Corneille in the same breath. He thought him inferior to Molière both in art and in manners. The plays of Shakespeare could have no world-wide repu-

[1] *Works*, iv. 502.

tation, said Voltaire; they could please only in London or in Canada. 'The masterpieces of France have been played before all the Courts and all the Academies of Italy. They are played from the shores of the Arctic Ocean to the sea which separates Europe from Africa. Let only one of Shakespeare's pieces receive the same honour, and then we may discuss his place.' [1] Voltaire readily admitted that the English were the masters of the French in philosophy, as were the Italians in music and painting; but in the art of Sophocles, Voltaire claimed for France the first rank. England, he thought, might well be content with her glories and geniuses in other departments, and might admit that in the fine arts her position was an inferior one. Putting an undoubted truth in his odd eighteenth-century phraseology, Voltaire wrote:—

'It seems that the same cause which denies to the English the genius of painting and music deprives them also of the genius for tragedy, This island, which has produced the greatest philosophers in the world, is not equally fertile in the fine arts; and if the English do not seriously seek to follow the teaching of their excellent citizens Addison and Pope, they will be far behind other nations in matters of taste and of literature.' [2]

When Voltaire was an old man he was made thoroughly angry to think that there were even

[1] *Works*, vii. 330. [2] *Id.* iv. 184. Letter prefixed to *Mérope*.

French critics who placed Shakespeare above the dramatic writers of France. Voltaire half repented of what he had done to make Shakespeare and English literature known to his fellow-countrymen. 'I have no wish,' he wrote in 1776 to Necker, 'to be a slave of the English. It is not my fault if the praises which I bestowed on the good English authors have been abused, and if the censer which I used to honour the English has been made a weapon to break my own head.'[1] In his irritated anger Voltaire burst out into amusing and exaggerated criticism. He wrote to the Marquise du Deffant:—

'I am angry with the English. They have not only, I believe, taken Pondichery, but they have just printed that their Shakespeare is infinitely above a theatre clown.

'Just imagine, madame, that in the tragedy of *Richard III.*, which the English compare to *Cinna*, for unity of time there are nine years, for unity of place some dozen towns and battle fields, and for unity of action thirty-seven principal events. But all that is a trifle.

'In the first act, Richard says that he is deformed and ill-odoured, and that, to revenge himself on nature, he will become a hypocrite and a knave. While he is talking in this delightful way, he sees a funeral procession pass by, the burial of King Henry IV. (*sic*); he stops the bier and the widow who was at the head of the procession. The widow

[1] *Works*, l.

utters loud cries, and reproaches him with having killed her husband. Richard replies that he is very glad of it, because it will make his possession of her more easy. The queen spits in his face; Richard thanks her, and pretends that nothing is so sweet as her spittle. The queen calls him "toad:" "Villainous toad, I wish my spittle were poison!" "Well, madam, kill me if you will; here is my sword." She takes it: Go, I have not the courage to kill you myself. . . . No, do not kill yourself, because you have found me beautiful. She goes on to bury her husband, and the two lovers speak of nothing else than love in the rest of the play.

'Is it not true that if our water-carriers wrote plays they would write more becoming and reasonable ones?

'I tell you all this, madam, because I am full of the subject. Is it not sad that the same country which produced Newton has also produced these monsters and admires them?' [1]

Sixteen years later than the date of this letter Voltaire was still abusing Shakespeare in his most emphatic manner. A French translator of Shakespeare had set him above all French dramatists, and Voltaire bursts out to his friend D'Argental:—

'France has not insults, fool's-caps, and pillories enough for such a scoundrel. My blood boils in my old veins while I speak to you about him. . . . And the terrible thing is that this monster has a party in

[1] *Works*, xli. 91. December 9, 1760.

France, and, to crown the calamity and the horror, it is I myself who was the first to speak about this Shakespeare. I was the first who showed to the French a few pearls which I had found in his enormous dunghill. I did not expect that what I had done would one day be used in assisting to trample under foot the crowns of Racine and of Corneille, and to place them upon the brow of a barbarous mountebank.' [1]

Voltaire was never able to understand the English enthusiasm for Shakespeare, and classed it as a national madness which was beyond the comprehension of any foreigner. As far as he could, he tried to explain it to himself by the feeble reflection that the people everywhere like shows and the noisy bustle of dramatic business, and by remarking that everywhere, and especially in free countries, the better taste of the educated and superior minds is overruled by the crude views of the populace. He even thought that Garrick's acting might have something to do with it, and that Garrick, by his picturesque yet natural representation of the 'passions which Shakespeare has disfigured and exaggerated in a ridiculous way,' might have made the English fancy that Shakespeare was of more worth than Corneille. Voltaire's Shakespearian criticism is of course of no serious value. It has an amusing interest only as it is the natural and characteristic comment of the most famous of modern

[1] *Works*, l. 58. July, 19, 1776.

Frenchmen on the greatest of English writers. No educated Frenchman of the present day would take his idea of Shakespeare from what Voltaire has said about him; and indeed, in spite of Voltaire's somewhat profuse talk about Shakespeare, it is very doubtful whether he had more than a slight acquaintance with more than three or four of the plays. The dramas on which almost the whole of Voltaire's utterances turn are *Julius Cæsar*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Othello*; there are a few references to one or two of the English historical plays, and very little else. If Voltaire read all Shakespeare while he was in England, he did not much return to his author afterwards. He does, indeed, incidentally mention in the *Dictionnaire Philosophique* that he had glanced at Dr. Johnson's edition of Shakespeare. A very interesting letter, written in Voltaire's house by a French dramatist to Garrick, is proof both of the surprise which Voltaire felt in 1755 when the beauties of *Romeo and Juliet* were pointed out to him, and of his perfect readiness to admit them:—

'I did not fail to tell him what I thought of his very false and thoughtless expressions on Shakespeare. He perfectly admitted that he was *an amiable barbarian, a seductive madman*; these are Voltaire's own words; but the grand cause of his ill-humour is the irregularity of the illustrious poet's methods, an irregularity which you yourself are far from defending. As to the naturalness, the warmth, the

admirable thoughts and ideas scattered through Shakespeare's plays, Voltaire perfectly admits them, and laughingly agrees that if you English took fewer of our ships and were not such ocean-pirates as you are he would have been a little more gentle in his treatment of the creator of your theatre. I struck him by the eagerness with which I supported my opinion. I drew out my book, and read to him the scene between Romeo and Friar Laurence:—

Romeo, come forth, &c.

He began by laughing at my enthusiasm, but at these lines [which are not quite an accurate quotation]:—

'Tis torture, and not mercy; heaven is here,
Where Juliet lives. . . .
O Father, hadst thou not strong poison mix'd,
No sharp-ground knife, no present means of death,
But banishment to torture me withal?

he became animated, and said frankly that it was very beautiful, very touching, and very natural; but he went very much farther when I continued the scene, and when he heard that admirable *énumeration des parties* which proves Shakespeare's gift of eloquence more than a dozen tragedies:—

Thou canst not speak of what thou dost not feel:
Wert thou as young as I, Juliet thy love,
An hour but married, Tybalt murdered,
Doting like me, and like me banished,
Then might'st thou speak, then might'st thou tear thy hair,
And fall upon the ground, as I do now,
Taking the measure of an unmade grave.

'He hardly knew this play, which perhaps he read more than thirty years ago; but he asked me to read it to him again, and was enchanted with the cata-

strophe of the piece. I spoke to him of my dear Garrick. Oh! truly, 'he said to me, Mr. Garrick, according to the reports of those who have seen him, is an inimitable actor. Niece—speaking to Madame Denis, who has lived for a long time with her uncle—if I was younger and had a good digestion, I should have to go and see Garrick play. . . .

'To-day I reminded this great man of Macduff's sublime touch:

He has no children;

of the scene between young Arthur and his governor Hubert; and of many other beauties of the inimitable Shakespeare. I hardly doubt that I would bring him over to my way of thinking on this subject if I could make a longer stay at Geneva.' [1]

On Shakespeare and his merits Voltaire had some slight controversy with Diderot. 'You must admit,' wrote Diderot to Voltaire in 1762, 'that Shakespeare is a very extraordinary man.' [2] Voltaire and Diderot on at least one occasion personally discussed the question:—

'Every one knows with what desperation Voltaire endeavoured to disparage Shakespeare's worth. . . . I have been told of a conversation which Voltaire and Diderot had on this subject. . . . These two remarkable men were disputing on the works of the English dramatist. Voltaire was careful to dwell only on the

[1] *Works*, i. 332. Pierre Patin to Garrick. Aux Délices; Nov. 1, 1755.

[2] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, xix. 465. Paris, 1875–77. Sept. 29, 1762.

faults of his plays, and maliciously reproached him with his defects, which, as every one knows, are numerous enough. Diderot warmly defended the English poet, and adduced some of his admirable strokes of genius. I do not understand you people, said Voltaire ill-humouredly; you are infatuated about this buffoon. I really believe that you would without hesitation give him the preference over all that we have produced in the same style. No, sir, replied Diderot; I am not unjust enough to compare the Belvedere Apollo with St. Christopher of Notre-Dame.[1] But you will at least agree with me that, in spite of all its defects, there is something venerable and imposing in this Gothic colossus. Could you tell me, interrupted Madame Denis, who produced that monument? I do not at all know, replied Diderot after some reflection; but, he added, he was a mason. Yes, yes, a mason, said Voltaire; that is the right word. Yes, sir, said Diderot, he was only a mason, but the greatest men can pass between the legs of his colossus. You will certainly think this was a vigorous and very sensible retort. Voltaire was not overpoweringly pleased with Diderot.' [2]

Through all the inconsistencies and contradictions of Voltaire's observations on Shakespeare, it is easy enough to see that Voltaire viewed Shakespeare with very different eyes during two distinct periods of his

[1] A colossal statue in the nave of Notre-Dame. It was removed more than a hundred years ago.

[2] *Correspondance secrète, politique, et littéraire. Rédigé par Métra*, vi. 425. London, 1787.

own life. There was the period during which Voltaire studied the English poet for himself, and gladly —though even then always with certain reserves— made him known to his own fellow-countrymen. This was the time when he willingly admitted that in many ways, and especially in action and in interest, the English stage had a distinct superiority over the French, and when he himself ventured, if not very boldly, yet perhaps with as much daring as was at that time in France prudent, to introduce into his own plays a little of the energy and the action which so delighted him in the English theatre. But then, dating from about 1760, came a second period during which Voltaire—probably not without feelings of personal envy—was full of disgust for the growing enthusiasm with which Shakespeare and English literature were being received in France, and for the literary lawlessness of a generation which had not been bred, as he himself had, in the traditions of the days of Louis XIV. During this period Voltaire is far too angry with Shakespeare to be critical, and simply exhausts himself in violence and abuse. But that Voltaire's later remarks on the English stage are often sheer absurdity need not hinder us from listening to him when he is going upon sure ground. And after all, when Voltaire insists upon artistic simplicity and quiet delicacy in literary style and treatment, English writers might well find their account in listening. They are never likely to overdo it on this

side. In dedicating *Zaïre* to Falkener Voltaire wrote :—

Cette heureuse simplicité
Fut un des plus dignes partages
De la savante antiquité.
Anglais, que cette nouveauté
S'introduise dans vos usages.
Sur votre théâtre infecté
D'horreurs, de gibets, de carnages,
Mettez donc plus de vérité,
Avec de plus nobles images.
Addison l'a déjà tenté ;
C'était le poëte des sages,
Mais il était trop concerté ;
Et dans son *Caton* si vanté,
Ses deux filles, en vérité,
Sont d'insipides personages.
Imitez du grand Addison
Seulement ce qu'il a de bon ;
Polissez la rude action
De vos Melpomènes sauvages ;
Travaillez pour les connaisseurs
De tous les temps, de tous les âges ;
Et répandez dans vos ouvrages
La simplicité de vos mœurs.

Of the second greatest name in the realm of English pure literature Voltaire also has his word to say. Voltaire, though he did not spare candid criticism, spoke with no stinted praise of Milton in his early critical *Essay on Epic Poetry*; but that Essay was written in English and was intended for English readers. When he wrote in less restrained circumstances, he frequently said very severe and contemptuous things of Milton. It was of course not to be expected that Voltaire could much relish such a

poem as *Paradise Lost.* He detested blank verse. 'Blank verse was only invented by laziness and by inability to write in rhyme, as the celebrated Pope has twenty times confessed to me.' Neither could he care much for the subject of the poem. 'A Mr. George Gray published in 1770 a kind of parody of Milton, and sent his piece to Voltaire at Ferney. Voltaire replied that he had always thought that the story of the apple deserved nothing better than a joking treatment *in dogrel rhimes*, and that he was bored by an angel Gabriel and a villainous devil who were always saying the same thing.[1] He was only a trifle more complimentary in his verses *On the Epic Poets.* He mentions Homer, Virgil, Tasso, and then adds :—

> Milton, plus sublime qu'eux tous,
> A des beautés moins agréables ;
> Il semble chanter pour les fous,
> Pour les anges, et pour les diables.

Voltaire thought that Milton's genius was somewhat harsh and his style often rugged, and that, instead of sacrificing to the Graces, as the Greeks recommended that poets should do, Milton had sacrificed to the Devil. He delighted Madame du Deffant by an outburst against Milton in *Candide.* There Milton is a barbarian who makes a commentary on the first chapter of Genesis in ten books of harsh lines; who spoils the Hell and the Devil of Tasso; whose Lucifer is sometimes a toad and sometimes a

[1] *Works*, xlvii. 138.

theological disputant; whose devils fire cannon; and who, while Moses represents the Eternal Being as creating the world by His word, makes Jehovah trace out his work with a pair of compasses taken from some cupboard in heaven. 'The marriage of Sin and of Death, and the Snakes born from Sin make everyone of the slightest delicacy sick; and his long description of a hospital is fitted for nobody but a grave-digger. This obscure, strange, and disgusting poem, was scorned when it appeared, and I am only treating it now as it was treated in England itself.'

The one English author whom Voltaire praises most warmly, but always critically, is Addison. In the *Siècle de Louis Quatorze*, Voltaire calls Addison's poem *The Campaign* a more durable monument to Marlborough than the palace of Blenheim. Voltaire thought Addison the wisest of English writers, the writer whose taste was surer and whose literary criticism was more authoritative than those of any other English author. Addison, said Voltaire, is perhaps of all English writers the one who best knew how to guide his genius by good taste. His style was correct, his expression full of a wise imaginativeness, and his verse and his prose have elegance, force, and naturalness. As he was a friend of the proprieties and the rules, he desired to see dignity in the composition of tragedies, and his own play *Cato* is so written.' *Cato*, thought Voltaire, was the only really reasonable English tragedy, the only English tragedy written with sustained

dignity and elegance. Indeed, Voltaire thought that, since the times of the Greeks, the only Frenchman and the only Englishman who, in the drama, were masters of poetical expression and unfailing elegance, were Racine and Addison.[1] In his enthusiasm for a play in which, if the thoughts were worthy of Cato, the verse was worthy of Virgil, Voltaire said that he thought the *rôle* of Cato one of the finest that existed on any stage, and that in the once famous speech, 'Cato, thou reasonest well'—a speech which Voltaire himself translated into French—Addison had wished to dispute the mastery with Shakespeare. It was an occasional satisfaction to Voltaire to reflect that everything in England was not gothic and barbarous, though he found it hard to understand how an age that had produced *Cato* could take any pleasure in such a barbarous and monstrous affair as *Hamlet*. Yet Voltaire's French eye found something of Shakespeare's barbarity and lawlessness even in Addison's once famous and always frigid performance. What a pity that, after all, this Addison, with all the eloquence of his noble and sober style, had dramatic defects which made any reformation of the English stage at his hands impossible!

'It is a great pity that such a beautiful thing is not, after all, a beautiful tragedy. The disconnected scenes, which often leave the stage empty, the overlong and inartistic asides, the cold and insipid love

[1] *Works*, iv. 490.

scenes, a conspiracy which has nothing to do with the play, and a certain Sempronius who is disguised and is killed on the stage, all make the famous tragedy of *Cato* a piece which our actors would never dare to play, even if we French thought in the Roman or the English fashion. The barbarity and the irregularity of the London stage have forced their way even into the discretion of Addison. I seem to see the Czar Peter, who, while he was reforming the Russian people, kept still himself something of his own education and of the manners of his country.'

In spite of the praise which Voltaire was never weary of lavishing on Addison's play, he recognised that *Cato* had one fatal defect. The piece was cold and passionless. Voltaire himself was forced to confess that correctness of style, dignity and purity of diction, and genius which was always directed by sound and sure taste, would not themselves do if passion, lively dialogue, and action were absent. From the frigid correctness of a play like *Cato* one would always return to Shakespeare's rude but fascinating irregularities. And however much Voltaire's own critical judgment might prefer *Cato* to *Hamlet*, he recognised not only the impossibility but the absurdity of attempting to force upon a nation a style of literature which was quite foreign to the nation's own genius. He himself compared the poetic genius of England to a tufted tree which threw out a thousand boughs as nature and chance pleased, a tree which

would die if it was pruned and clipped and made into a tree of the gardens of Marly.

Scattered through Voltaire's works are stray observations on various English authors, observations which are almost always interesting though sometimes they are exceedingly odd. He thought English books too long. 'Yes: the English are chatterers; their books are too long.' But none the less Voltaire read English books voraciously. Perhaps, as was only natural, he was unacquainted with any English literature before that of Elizabeth's reign. Indeed, he distinctly declares that before the Elizabethan days the field of literature had never been cultivated in England.[1] Probably Voltaire did not know even the name of Chaucer, and perhaps the only English writers before the Restoration with whom he was really familiar were Bacon, Shakespeare, and Milton, and, in a far less degree, Spenser, Waller, and Cowley. He had been inquisitive enough to get some idea of the English stage before Shakespeare, and he gives a sarcastic analysis of *Gorboduc*, the first English tragedy:—

'Gorboduc was a good King and husband of a good Queen. In the first act, they divided their kingdom between their two children. The children quarrelled about the division. In the second act, the younger son gave the elder a box on the ear; in the third act, the elder killed the younger; in the fourth

[1] *Essai sur les Mœurs et l'Esprit des Nations. Works*, xiii. 56.

act, the mother killed the elder; in the fifth act, the King killed the Queen, and then the people rose, and killed King Gorboduc himself. So that at the end no one was left alive at all.'

Of Spenser, Voltaire has little more to say than that the English held his poem in esteem but were unable to read it. Cowley, said Voltaire, was an inharmonious poet who tried to be witty on every occasion. He compared Waller's reputation in London to that of Voiture at Paris, and thought Waller the better poet of the two. But Waller 'was not yet perfect. His productions in gallantry are full of grace, but he becomes languid through carelessness, and is often disfigured by false thinking. In his days, the English had not yet attained correctness in writing. But his serious works are full of a vigour which the effeminacy of his other pieces would not have led one to expect.' Voltaire himself translated part of Waller's funeral elegy on Cromwell. Bacon as an essayist was not so attractive to Voltaire as his own Montaigne and La Rochefoucauld. Bacon's essays, thought Voltaire, were fitted rather to instruct than to please; they were not satires on human nature like the Maxims of La Rochefoucauld, nor were they a school of scepticism like the Essays of Montaigne. Their audience was a less wide one than that which the two French writers addressed.

Voltaire's knowledge of English literature from the Restoration to the death of Pope was full and

familiar, though to the modern reader many of his judgments will seem perverse and unreasonable. He thought that Rochester was a man of genius and a great poet with a glowing imagination. He translated into French verse part of Rochester's Satire on Man and drew out a short comparison between Rochester and Boileau. He had studied the poetical works of Roscommon, of Dorset, and of the Duke of Buckingham. In the eagerness of his literary curiosity, Voltaire did not allow even Butler to baffle him, though he felt that it was impossible to make such a poem as *Hudibras* really known to French readers. But he translated in the metre of the original and in about eighty lines the first four hundred lines of the poem, remarking that a man who should have in his imagination the tenth part of the wit which reigns in *Hudibras* would be very witty, but would also be very careful to avoid translating such a poem into a foreign language :—

'The poem is an entirely comic work, and yet the subject is the civil war of the time of Cromwell. The cause of so many tears and of so much bloodshed was also the cause of a poem which compels the most serious reader to laugh. . . . *Hudibras*. . . . seems a compound of the *Satyre Ménippée* and of *Don Quixote*, and it has the advantage over them in being in verse. It has also the advantage in wit. . . . but by dint of his wit the author of *Hudibras* has discovered how to be much below Cervantes. Good taste, *naïveté*, artistic narration, a happy mingling of adventures,

absence of literary waste, are worth far more than mere wit; and so it is that all nations read *Don Quixote*, while *Hudibras* is read by the English alone.'

Voltaire's literary taste of course was annoyed by the extreme prolixity of Butler's poem. He had the same fault to find with Prior's poem *Alma*. He speaks of this as a singular piece, full of ingenious lines and of ideas as keen as they are amusing, but he thought it too long. 'Every piece of pleasantry should be short.' In Prior's poem on the battle of Hochstett, Voltaire found nothing good but the apostrophe to Boileau, which Voltaire himself thus translates:—

> Satirique flatteur, toi qui pris tant de peine
> Pour chanter que Louis n'a point passé le Rhin.

It was in speaking of another of Prior's works—*Solomon*—that Voltaire employed a phrase which has become proverbial. Prior, says Voltaire, paraphrased in fifteen hundred lines—Prior's lines are really nearly three thousand—Solomon's saying, 'All is vanity.' 'One might easily write fifteen thousand verses on the theme; *mais malheur à qui dit tout ce qu'il peut dire.*'

Voltaire was much pleased with Garth's *Dispensary*. He translated its opening lines and was inclined to rank the poem as a whole above the *Lutrin* of Boileau. 'It has much more imagination, variety, and *naïveté* than the *Lutrin*, and the astonishing thing is that in this piece profound erudition is

embellished by delicacy and by the graces.' The vigour and animation of Dryden's poems also greatly attracted Voltaire. In brilliancy and boldness he thought that no English poet equalled him and no ancient writer surpassed him. If Pope, said Voltaire rather curiously, had not written the *Essay on Man*, he would not have been comparable to Dryden. But though Voltaire thought Dryden a very great genius, he criticised him as impetuous and unequal. He was more productive than judicious, and his reputation would have stood much higher if he had only written the tenth part of his works. Voltaire, however, took unmixed delight in Dryden's Ode. 'The real English Pindar is Dryden, author of the beautiful Ode *Alexander's Feast*. . . . I confess that as I know English better than Greek I like this Ode a hundred times better than all Pindar.' Elsewhere Voltaire speaks of it as the one of all modern Odes in which the enthusiasm, while it never sinks into feebleness, equally avoids the false and the bombastic. But of Dryden as a dramatist Voltaire thought very little. On the other hand, Voltaire thoroughly appreciated Wycherley's Comedies. Of the *Country Wife* he says that while it is certainly not the school of good manners, it really is the school of wit and of good comedy. Voltaire thought the *Plain Dealer* the wittiest of all comedies ancient or modern. Wycherley's piece is founded on *Le Misanthrope*. Voltaire considered the English play infinitely more complicated, more

interesting, and more varied in incident than Molière's, but he was shocked by its outrageous manners. The English seem to take too much liberty and the French too little. Wycherley, says Voltaire,

'Who passed his life in the highest society, painted its absurdities and weaknesses in the strongest colours. The traits of Wycherley's *Plain Dealer* are more daring than those of Molière's piece, but they have also less refinement and propriety. The English writer has corrected the only defect of Molière's play: the want of intrigue and of interest. The English play is an interesting one, and its intrigue is ingenious, but it is too daring for the French taste.'

Among other English dramatists, Voltaire shows acquaintance with the works of the now quite forgotten Nathaniel Lee, with Congreve, with Vanbrugh, and with Otway. He gives a sarcastic analysis of Otway's *Orphan* and sneers at *Venice Preserved* as a monstrous play with some fine scenes.

On English novelists Voltaire has not much to say. He makes the rather obvious remark that English romances were hardly read in Europe before the appearance of *Pamela*; but Voltaire himself was no admirer of Richardson. *Clarissa Harlowe* only bored him. He wrote to his friend the Marquise du Deffant:—

'You were so enthusiastic about *Clarissa* that I read it for relaxation during my fever; but the reading heated my blood. For so lively and keen a man

as I am, it is a cruel thing to read nine whole volumes in which there is nothing at all, and which show us nothing except that Miss Clarissa is in love with a dissipated man named Lovelace. I said: If all these people were my relations and friends I could take no interest in them. The author seems to me nothing but a dexterous man who knows the curiosity of the human race, and who spins out his matter from volume to volume for the sake of the sale. . . . I should not like to be condemned to read this romance a second time. In my opinion nothing is good which cannot be read a second time without disgust.' [1]

Voltaire admitted the truth and the gaiety of the writings of the much robuster Fielding, but he could find nothing endurable in *Tom Jones* but the character of the barber. He reckoned Sterne the second Rabelais of England, Swift, of course, being the first. When a French translation of the first half of *Tristram Shandy* appeared, Voltaire in 1777 wrote an article upon it. He called it a very unaccountable and original book, a mixture of buffoonery and philosophy. A young Venetian visited Voltaire at Ferney in 1769, and the conversation turned on English literature. Voltaire by preference selected from it Garth's *Dispensary*, Prior's *Henry and Emma*, Pope's *Prologue to Cato*, and indeed the smallest work of Pope, but of Shakespeare and Milton he could hardly speak with patience.[2] The traditions of the literary school in

[1] *Works*, xl. 350. April 12, 1760.
[2] *Temple Bar*, Jan. 1882, p. 124.

which Voltaire was trained must always be remembered when one is startled by the grotesque oddity of some of his literary judgments.

In March 1764 appeared the first number of *La Gazette Littéraire de l'Europe*, a literary periodical which only ran a two years' course. Of the many articles which Voltaire wrote in it, some are concerned with English subjects. He proves the catholicity of his reading in English literature by reviews of Lowth's *Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* and of an anonymous romance entitled *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville*. He noted with approval a new French translation of Algernon Sidney's *Discourses on Government*, the one of all political works, thought Voltaire, in which the principles of free governments were developed and sustained with most warmth and force. He poured a stream of ridicule over Lord Kames' *Elements of Criticism*, sarcastically admiring the progress of the human understanding which allowed rules of taste in all the arts, from epic poetry down to gardening, to come from Scotland. He was encouraged to hope for the speedy arrival of treatises on poetry and rhetoric from the Orkneys.[1] In a review of a new translation of Lady Mary Wortley

[1] Kames had found fault with the *Henriade*, and had exalted Shakespeare. Hume, who was in Paris in 1764, tried to have Voltaire's article suppressed: 'but the authors of that Gazette told me that they durst neither suppress nor alter anything that came from Voltaire.' Burton's *Hume*, ii. 195.

Montagu's *Letters*, Voltaire compared her with two famous Frenchwomen :—

'Lady Mary Montagu has been called the Sévigné of England. But she has neither Madame de Sévigné's rapidity of style nor her lively and sensitive imagination. Hers is a charming elegance, nourished by an erudition which would do honour to a *savant*, and yet tempered by the graces. And in Lady Mary Montagu's work there is always present that spirit of philosophy and of liberty which is the characteristic of her nation. In the Letters of Madame de Sévigné there is much more of feeling than of thinking. Madame de Maintenon sometimes wrote what she did not really think; whatever Lady Mary Montagu thinks, she writes. The letters of these two Frenchwomen interest their own country alone; the Letters of Lady Mary Montagu seem intended for all countries which desire to be instructed.' [1]

The poems of the now forgotten Charles Churchill attracted Voltaire's attention, and if he blames Churchill for his choice of subjects of merely local and temporary interest, and for the excessive bitterness of his satire and party spirit, he also praises him in a way which seems strange enough now. He finds his verse full of *verve*, of warmth and energy. Churchill's popularity in his own day was great; Voltaire says of him that he passes for one of the greatest of the English poets, perhaps even, in the class of satirical poets, for the very best :—

[1] *Works*, xxv. 163.

'He has less resemblance to Pope than to Dryden, whom he seems to have studied more. He is not as pure and correct as Pope; but his manner is more original, and his style, though its elegance is less constant, has a more abundant and varied harmony. Fault has been found with Pope because his verses almost always go in pairs, the sense finishing with each couplet. Churchill marches more freely; but he is often loose and careless, and his style is embarrassed by parentheses, which are even inserted in one another, and run sometimes to twenty or thirty lines. This is a very common fault with English writers both in prose and in verse.'

In his old age Voltaire thought that the best days of English literature were over. In 1770 he wrote: 'I think that it is with the English as it is with ourselves; the grand time of their genius is past. They have no second Addison, or Pope, or Swift.' Yet Voltaire kept up his interest in English literature to the very last. Within a very few days of his death he wrote from Paris to his secretary Wagnière, asking for some books and papers, among them an English one which Voltaire himself calls *the origine of the language*.[1] So the inquisitiveness into English literature, which had begun more than fifty years before in the Bastille, lasted on till the very last moments of Voltaire's life.

[1] *Works*, lii. 603. May 10, 1778.

CHAPTER VIII

VOLTAIRE'S LATER RELATIONS WITH ENGLISHMEN

Rumour vaguely asserts that Voltaire's English visit ended in unpleasant circumstances. There was, says rumour, some mystery connected with Voltaire's return to France, some private quarrel, or even some scandal and personal disgrace. The scurrilous Abbé Desfontaines, telling in his *Voltairomanie* how Voltaire was soundly thrashed by an English bookseller, sneeringly remarks that as Voltaire had been caned out of France so he was caned back to it. The unsupported word of Desfontaines is worthless, and if this particular story is true, it is almost inconceivable that no other enemy of Voltaire should ever have referred to it. But it was asserted in print, a little more than three years after Voltaire's return to France, that his departure from England was attended with, or even occasioned by, some annoying and vexatious incidents. A writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, making some slight reference to the *History of Charles the Twelfth*, says of Voltaire: 'After having enriched himself with our contributions, he behaved so ill that

he was refused admittance into those noblemen's and gentlemen's families in which he had been received with great marks of favour and distinction. He left England full of resentment, and wrote the King of Sweden's life to abuse this nation and the Hanover family.'[1] It is probable that the first of these sentences is as ridiculously untrue as the second. Somewhat similar charges of misconduct in England are made by another writer who had a personal quarrel with Voltaire. One Saint-Hyacinthe, a soldier who had become a man of letters, had renewed in London a slight acquaintance which he had had with Voltaire in Paris. Duvernet says that Saint-Hyacinthe was one of the many needy Frenchmen in England whom Voltaire generously assisted with the money which the *Henriade* had brought him. In London, Voltaire and Saint-Hyacinthe quarrelled. They both carried their complaints to a common friend, and this friend, a M. de Burigny, very many years later, wrote a complete account of the dispute between the two authors. In the course of his narrative de Burigny writes: 'M. de Saint-Hyacinthe has repeatedly told me that M. de Voltaire conducted himself in England with great irregularity; that he made many enemies there by proceedings which were not in accordance with strict moral principles; he [Saint-Hyacinthe] even went into details with me, but I will not repeat them because they may be exaggerated. However that may

[1] *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1732, p. 739.

be, he informed Voltaire that, if he did not change his conduct, he would publicly express his disapproval of it; which he thought a duty, in order that the English people might not think that the French were worthy of the blame which Voltaire himself merited.'[1] As Voltaire only replied to Saint-Hyacinthe's threats with contemptuous silence, Saint-Hyacinthe denounced him as he had said he would do. The result was a literary quarrel conducted in a manner which did honour to neither of the disputants. But what the objectionable proceedings really were by which Voltaire so scandalised Saint-Hyacinthe is still a question to which there is no answer.

Whatever truth or falsehood there may be in these vague, unauthenticated rumours—and it would be rash to say that because they are quite unauthenticated they certainly contain no truth—there is every reason for rejecting one very circumstantial story which professes to detail the exact circumstances in which Voltaire left England. A story which appears for the first time seventy years after the events which it pretends to narrate, and an anonymous author who is so much the victim of passion that before settling down to his tale he must speak of Voltaire as 'worse than a devil,' are evidently open to the most serious suspicion. This extraordinary narrator roundly and joyfully asserts that Voltaire left England in disgrace, or as, with all the feeble force of italics and capitals, he puts

[1] *Lettre de M. de Burigny ; ut supra.*

it himself in his amusing way: 'He *very* narrowly escaped being suddenly dismissed from ENGLAND to HELL.' The story is this. Lord Peterborough, who had engaged Voltaire to write and publish a certain work, from time to time supplied him with money to meet the necessary expenses of production. At Parson's Green, Peterborough's delightful suburban place, renowned for its wonderful gardens, Voltaire was a frequent guest, and on one of his visits there Peterborough urged him to hasten the publication of the long-delayed book. Voltaire replied that English printers and publishers were very slow. Now, says the anonymous libeller, Voltaire, to whom Peterborough had regularly advanced all the funds he had asked for, had only paid the bookseller one miserably small deposit, and, in reply to constant pressure for more, had merely said that Peterborough would make no further payments till the work was finished. The bookseller, becoming suspicious, waited on Peterborough, whom he found walking in his gardens with two or three gentlemen after dinner. The printing-press, said the bookseller to Peterborough, was stopped for want of supplies; he had received nothing from Voltaire but one payment of ten pounds; he thought that Voltaire must be acting deceitfully, and he had therefore come to report the actual state of things to Peterborough himself. Peterborough was so indignant that in his first quick rage connected language failed him, and he could only mutter 'the villain':—

'At that instant Voltaire appeared at the end of a very long gravel-walk. Lord Peterborough exclaimed: "Here he comes, and I will *kill* him *instantly*." So saying, he drew his sword and ran like lightning. Happily, or perhaps unhappily, for the wretch Voltaire, Mr. St. André, then present, caught Lord Peterborough in his arms, exclaiming: "Good God! my lord, if you murder him, you will be hanged." "*I care not for that*; I WILL KILL THE VILLAIN!" The walk being one of the old-fashioned King William garden-walks, very long, Voltaire proceeded some way before he descried the London bookseller. At the moment, Mr. St. André screamed out: "Fly for your life, for I cannot hold my Lord many moments longer." And he declared to my friend that, young and strong, the hero neither, yet invigorated by his extreme indignation, it was with his utmost exertions that he confined him, his sword drawn in one hand, which he would not drop, hoping to escape, and, as he said, plunge it in his vile heart. He broke loose; but love of life had given wings to the worse than fiend—he fled, concealed himself that night in a village, went the next day to London, and proceeded immediately to the Continent, leaving his portmanteau, papers, &c., at Lord Peterborough's. He went without a hat —whether he strolled into the garden without it, or that it fell in his flight, I do not recollect.'[1]

Mythical stories naturally gather round the career of a man who has aroused such hatreds and passions as Voltaire. This particular anecdote is just one of

[1] *The Gentleman's Magazine* for 1797. Vol. lxvii. part II. p. 821.

the things which the impartial observer will flatly refuse to believe. The writer of it is anonymous. No authority is cited to support it, no reference is elsewhere made to it. It does not find its way even anonymously into the light till seventy years after Voltaire and Peterborough had met, and it is the work of a man whom, as other parts of his letter show, the mere mention of Voltaire's name was almost enough to deprive of his reason. These facts would be enough to throw the strongest doubt on any otherwise uncorroborated scandal. They mark as a mean falsehood the extraordinary assertion that Voltaire cheated and robbed Lord Peterborough, and fled from England to save his life from the sword of the generous patron who had offered him his friendship and hospitality.

It was probably in February 1729 that Voltaire returned to France. He had been in England for about two years and nine months. As he did not venture at once to appear in Paris, he remained for some time in hiding at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, whence he corresponded, under an assumed name, with Thieriot. It was not till April that Maurepas, the lieutenant of police, sent Voltaire permission to visit Paris when he pleased, and even to stay there; at the same time warning him that he had better not yet show himself at Court.[1]

After this long and memorable visit, Voltaire

[1] *Works*, i. 309.

never saw England again. But he always retained a lively interest in England and English affairs, and he frequently expressed a wish to return to the country which had entertained him with such ready kindliness. In 1743 England paid him a further compliment by electing him a member of the Royal Society of London. His name appears in the list as Dr. Franciscus Arouet de Voltaire, *Parisiensis*. He was often asked to revisit England; he says himself that he was invited twenty times to come.[1] In 1730 Thieriot was in London; and Voltaire, writing to him in November and making mention of Gay, the Duchess of Queensberry, and Lady Bolingbroke, ends with the exclamation: 'To think that I cannot be in London this winter! I would be wholly occupied there in the service of the graces and of virtue.'[2] And again, three or four years later, and expressing himself this time in English, Voltaire says:—

'Have you not been long enough in the damp air of London? Had I consulted but my love for liberty, and my desire of living with you, certainly I had posted away to Covent Garden and to Russel Street: but I was nailed up in France by all the services my friends have done for me. I could not, without ingratitude, forsake my own affairs, of which they have taken so constant and so useful a care. Had it not been for this, depend upon it I would have passed the rest of my days in London. . . . An author at

[1] *Works*, xl. 244. [2] *Id.* xxxiii. 201.

London may give a full career to his thoughts; here we must stint them. We have here but the tenth part of our souls.'[1]

Twenty years later, in a letter to Falkener, Voltaire wrote: 'I hope to come over myself, in order to print my true works, and to be buried in the land of freedom. . . . If I live, and if I am free, I will cross the sea to thank you, my dear friend.'[2]

Voltaire not only infected the divine Emilie with his own English enthusiasm, but when in 1733 they retreated together to her broken-down castle of Cirey, he taught her English, and was delighted to see the extraordinary facility with which she acquired it. The mathematical Marquise and her friend read Pope, Locke, and Newton together. Occasional tiffs and poutings, sulky silences and flashes of fiery speech, made the life at Cirey not a purely idyllic one; and it is rather odd that, when the quarrels of these two sensitive beings had reached the vocal stage, they should, at times at least, have chosen English as the language of their mutual recriminations. Madame de Grafigny, who spent six months at Cirey in 1738 and 1739, records one of the slightly absurd little scenes between Voltaire and Emilie. The Marquise wished him to change his coat, while Voltaire preferred to wear his somewhat shabby, and probably more comfortable one. Voltaire, at last losing patience

[1] *Works*, xxxiii. 466. To Thieriot, some time in 1734.
[2] *Id.* xxxvii. 555. Berlin, Jan. 16, 1753.

with the irritating feminine pertinacity, left the room, having decided that he would have a convenient colic; but he first addressed Emilie with much vivacity, and his lively eloquence was in English.[1] His English speech and his English memories had generally, however, happier associations than such as these. He called Emilie's Cirey château 'Cireyshire,' and a province of England.[2] In later years at Ferney he laid out his gardens in the free English fashion; and when he was a very old man there he repeated more than once that if he regretted anything in the world it was the delightful banks of the Thames. In a familiarly written English letter he makes kindly reference to some of the friends he had left behind him in England:—

'I hope Sir Homer Pope and Sir Ovid Gay will be so kind as to forgive my boldness [Voltaire had been saying that some verses of theirs were not quite fitted for their purpose]; you know I entertain for them the sense of the highest esteem: I admire their works, I love their persons, I would with all my heart live with them, but you know I am tied; I am fettered here by my studies, my works, my fortune and my health. . . . Farewell, my dear friend, love the English nation, ingratiate me with your friends: tell chiefly my lord and my lady Bolingbroke I am attached to them for life. My respects to the great foes, Mr.

[1] *Vie Privée de Voltaire et de Madame du Châtelet. By Madame de Grafigny. Paris*, 1820, p. 43.

[2] *Works*, xxxiv. 555.

Pulteney and my lord and lady Harvey. Drink my health with the glutton Pope.'[1]

As Voltaire liked to keep up by correspondence his acquaintance with the friends he had known in England, there can be little doubt that in private collections and unexamined archives lie hidden, and perhaps unknown, English letters of his dated from Cirey, from Berlin, and from Ferney. A considerable number of such letters may be found in the completest editions of Voltaire's Works; but there are others, unknown to the French editors, slumbering in the unread pages of obscure and forgotten English publications, or acquired by the British Museum Library since the date of the latest and completest edition of Voltaire.

To Falkener, the English friend with whom Voltaire continued his intimacy more affectionately than with any other, Voltaire almost invariably wrote in English. In 1735 the rich English merchant, Voltaire's old host, was appointed English ambassador to Turkey; and it was a curious thing that Voltaire, when he had long before prophesied official distinction for Falkener, had selected this particular post as the one he was to occupy. He wrote to Falkener, reminding and congratulating him:—

'*De Cirey, près Vassy en Champagne, le* 18 *septembre*, 1735.

'My dear friend! your new title will change neither my sentiments, nor my expressions. My dear

[1] *Works*, xxxiii. 268. To Thieriot. Paris, May 26, 1732.

Falkener! friendship is full of talk, but it must be discreet. In the hurry of business you are in, remember only I talk'd to you, about seven years ago, of that very same ambassy. Remember I am the first man who did fortell the honour you enjoy. Believe, then, no man is more pleased with it than I am. I have my share in your happiness.

'If you pass through France in your way to Constantinople, I advise you I am but twenty leagues from Calais, almost in the road to Paris. The Castle is called Cirey, four miles from Vassy en Champagne, on Saint-Dizier's road, and eight miles from Saint-Dizier. The post goes thither. There lives a young lady called the marquise Du Châtelet, whom I have taught English to, and who longs to see you. You will lie here, if you remember your friend.'[1]

When Falkener had arrived at Constantinople, Voltaire wrote again :—

'*A Cirey, en Champagne, ce 22 février* 1736.

'Now the honest, the good and plain philosopher of Wandsworth, represents his king and country, and is equal to the Grand-Seignior. Certainly England is the only country where commerce and virtue are to be rewarded with such an honour. If any grief rests still upon my mind, my dear friend, (for friend you are, tho' a minister), it is that I am unable to be a witness of your new sort [*lot*] of glory and felicity. Had I not regulated my life after a way which makes me a kind of *solitaire*, I would fly to that nation of savage slaves, whom I hate, to see the man I love.

[1] *Works*, xxxiii. 528.

What would my entertainment be! and how full the overflowings of my heart, in contemplating my dear Falkener, amidst so many Infidels of all hues, smiling with his humane philosophy at the superstitious follies that reign on the one side at Stamboul, and on the other at Salata! I would not admire, as my lady Worthley Montagu says,

> The vizir proud, distinguished from the rest;
> Six slaves in gay attire, his bridle hold,
> His bridle rich with gems, his stirrups gold!

For, how the devil! should I admire a slave upon a horse? My friend Falkener I should admire.

'But I must bid adieu! to the great town of Constantin, and stay in my little corner of the world, in that very same castle where you were invited to come in your way to Paris, in case you should have taken the road of Calais to Marseille. Your taking an other way, was certainly a sad disappointment for me, and especially to that lady who makes use of your Locke and of more of your other books. Upon my word! a French lady who reads Newton, Locke, Addison and Pope, and who retires from the bubbles and the stunning noise of Paris, to cultivate in the country the great and amiable genius she is born with, is more valuable than your Constantinople, and all the Turkish empire.

'You may confidently write to me, by the way of Marseille, *chez madame la marquise Du Châtelet, à Cirey, en Champagne.* Be sure I shall not stir from that spot of ground, before the favour of your letter comes to me. . . .

'What concerns me much more, what I long more

to be informed of is, whether you are as happy as you seem to be. Have you got a little private *seraglio*? or, are you to be married? Are you over-stoked with business? Does your indolence or laziness comply with your affairs? Do you drink much of that good Cyprus wine? For my part, I am here too happy, though my health is ever very weak:

Excepto quod non simul esses, caetera laetus.

'Addio! mio carissimo ambasciadore! Addio! le baccio umilmente le mani! L'amo, et la reverisco!'[1]

As the years passed on, Voltaire continued his friendly correspondence with Falkener:—

'*Bruxelles, ce 2 mars*, 1740.

'Dear Sir, I take the liberty to send you my old follies, having no new things to present you with. I am now at Bruxelles with the same lady, madame Du Châtelet, who hindered me some years ago from paying you a visit at Constantinople, and whom I shall live with in all probability the greatest part of my life, since for these ten years I have not departed from her. She is now at the trouble of a damn'd suit in law, that she pursues at Bruxelles. We have abandoned the most agreeable retirement in the country, to bawl here in the grotto of the flemish *chicane*. . . .

'I am persuaded you are become, now a days, a perfect Turk; you speak no doubt their language very well, and you keep, to be sure, a pretty *harem*. Yet I am

[1] *Works*, xxxiv. 35.

afraid you want two provisions or ingredients which I think necessary *to make that nauseous draught of life go down*, I mean books and friends. Should you be happy enough to have met at Pera with men whose conversation agrees with your way of thinking? If so, you want for nothing; for you enjoy health, honours and fortune. Health and places I have not: I regret the former, I am satisfied without the other. As to fortune, I enjoy a very competent one, and I have a friend besides. Thus I reckon myself happy, though I am sickly as you saw me at Wandsworth.

'I hope I shall return to Paris with madame Du Châtelet in two years time. If, about that season, you return to dear England by the way of Paris, I hope I shall have the pleasure to see your dear Excellency at her house, which is without doubt one of the finest at Paris, and situated in a position worthy of Constantinople; for it looks upon the river, and a long tract of land interspers'd with pretty houses, is to be seen from every window. Upon my word, I would, with all that, prefer the *vista* of the sea of Marmora before that of the Seine, and I would pass some months with you at Constantinople, if I could live without that lady, whom I look upon as a great man, and as a most solid and respectable friend. She understands Newton; she despises superstition, and in short, she makes me happy.

'I have received, this week, two summons from a French man who intends to travel to Constantinople. He would fain intice me to that pleasant journey. But since you could not, nobody can.

'Farewell, my dear friend, whom I will love and honour all my lifetime, farewell. Tell me how you fare; tell me you are happy; I am so, if you continue to be so. Yours for ever!

'Voltaire.'[1]

Once more:—

'If I have forgot the scraps of English I once had gathered, I'll never forget my dear ambassador. I am now at Paris, and with the same *she-philosopher* I have lived with these twelve years past. Was I not so constant in my bargains for life, I would certainly come to see you in your kiosk, in your quiet and your glory.

'You will hear of the new victory of my good friend the king of Prussia, who wrote so well against Machiavel, and acted immediately like the heroes of Machiavel. He fiddles and fights as well as any man in christendom. He routs the Austrian forces, and loves but very little your king, his dear neighbour of Hanover. I have seen him twice, since he is free from his father's tyranny. He would retain me at his court, and live with me in one of his country houses, just with the same freedom and the same goodness of manners you did at Wandsworth. But he could not prevail against the *marquise Du Châtelet*. My only reason for being in France, is that I am her friend. . . .

'I hope the bearer of this will tell you with what tenderness I will be for ever your humble and faithful servant,

'Voltaire.'[2]

[1] *Works*, xxxv. 389.

[2] *Id.* xxxvi. 137. The date is some time in 1742.

In 1745, George the Second selected Falkener as private and confidential Secretary to the Duke of Cumberland in the European campaign. In that same year, Cumberland took chief command of the allied forces in the Low Countries. In October, when the fighting for that year was nearly over, Falkener at Villevoorde received a letter from Voltaire at Paris. Voltaire, believing that the Falkener who was his friend was still at Constantinople, imagined that the Duke of Cumberland's new Secretary might be some kinsman of Sir Everard's. And as Voltaire was now historiographer of France and was anxious to secure trustworthy information on the historical and political occurrences of the day, he thought that this Secretary Falkener might supply him with material which would be first-hand and of special value. He wrote to him in English :-

Sir, you bear a name that I love and respect. I have, these twenty years since, the honour to be friend to sir Everard Falkener. I hope it is a recommendation towards you. A better one is my love for truth. I am bound to speak it. My duty is to write the history of the late campaigns, and my king and my country will approve me the more, the greater justice I'll render to the english nation.

'Though our nations are ennemies at present, yet they ought for ever to entertain a mutual esteem for one another. My intention is to relate what the Duke of Cumberland has done worthy of himself and his name, and to enregister the most particular and noble

actions of your chiefs and officers, which deserve to be recorded, and what passed most worthy of praise at Dettingen and Fontenoy, particularities, if there is any, about general sir James Campbel's death, in short, all that deserves to be transmitted to posterity.

'I dare or presume to apply to you, sir, on that purpose; if you are so kind as to send me some memoirs, I'll make use of them. If not, I'll content myself with relating what has been acted noble and glorious on our side; and I will mourn to leave in silence many great actions done by your nation, which it would have been glorious to relate.'[1]

The mistake was soon set right, much to Voltaire's satisfaction. He at once resumed his correspondence with his old friend:—

'My dear and honorable friend,—How could I guess your musulman person had shifted Galata for Flanders? and had passed from the seraglio to the closet of the Duke of Cumberland? But now I conceive it is more pleasant to live with such a prince, than to speak in state to a grand-visir by the help of an interpreter.

'Had I thought it was my dear sir Everard who was secretary to the great prince, I had certainly taken a journey to Flanders. My duty is to visit the place where your nation gave such noble proofs of her steady courage. An historian ought to look on and view the theatre, in order to dispose the scenery of the work. This would have been a sufficient motive to ask leave of coming to you. But what greater

[1] *Works*, xxxvi. 396. Oct. 1, 1745.

reason, what better motive than my friendship for you? Who would be so cruel as to deprive me of the pleasure of embracing again my dear friend? You would have procured to me the honour to see your noble and royal master, and to approach that great prince, whom I admire from afar. I should have learned more in two or three conversations with you, than I could do by letters. Since you are so loath to write, pray, my dear sir, in the name of an old friendship, be not so neglectful. A secretary must be used to write: and the man by whom our letters are conveyed, knows very well we do not talk of politics.

'Your kindness to me, your public spirited soul, your passion for your prince's glory shall induce you to impart to me the instructions I ask of you. . . .

'By the god the friendship! if you was to stay one month longer in Flanders, I would post away from Paris to see you; for I will be all my life your faithful and tender friend the sick

'Voltaire.'[1]

A characteristic note was received by Falkener soon after Cumberland's Culloden campaign:—

'My dearest and most respected friend,—Although I am a popish dog, much addicted to his Holiness, and like to be saved by his power, yet I retain for my life something of the english in me; and I cannot but pay you my compliment upon the brave conduct of your illustrious duke. You have made a rude, rough campaign in a climate pretty different from that of Turkey.

[1] *Works*, xxxvi. 403. Paris, Oct. 23, 1745.

'You have got amongst your prisoners of war a French nobleman called the marquis d'Eguilles, brother to that noble and ingenious madman who has wrote the *Lettres juives*. The marquis is possessed of as much wit as his brother, but is a little wiser. I think nobody deserves more your obliging attention, I daresay kindness. I recommend him to you from my heart. My dear Falkener is renouned in France for many virtues and dear to me for many benefits; let him do me this new favour, I will be attached to him for all my life.

'Farewell, my dear friend; let all men be friends, let peace reign over all Europe!'[1]

In 1747, Sir Everard Falkener married the wealthy Miss Churchill. Falkener wrote to Voltaire on the birth of his child, and Voltaire replied:—

'Dear Sir,—Your letter has afforded me the most sensible satisfaction; for when my friendship for you began, it was a bargain for life. Time that alters all things, and chiefly my poor tattered body, has not altered my sentiments.

'You acquaint me you are a husband and a father, and I hope you are an happy one. It behoves a Secretary to a great general, to marry a great officer's daughter; and really, I am transported with joy to see the blood of Marlborough, mixed with that of my dearest Falkener. I do present your lady with my most humble respects, and I kiss your child.

'You are a lusty husband, and I, a weak bachelor, as much unhealthy as when you sawe me, but some

[1] *Works*, xxxvi. 454. Paris, June 13, 1746.

twenty years older. Yet I have a kind of conformity with you; for if you are attached to a hero, so I am in the retinue of another, though not so intimately as you are. My king has appointed me one of the ordinary gentlemen of his chamber: *gentilhomme ordinaire de sa chambre.* Your post is more honourable and profitable; yet I am satisfied with mine, because if it gives not a great income, it leaves me at my full liberty, which I prefer to kings.

'The king of Prussia would once have given me one thousand pounds sterling *per annum* to live at his court; and I did not accept of the bargain, because the court of a king is not comparable to the house of a friend. I have lived these twenty years since with the same friends; and you know what power friendship gets over a tender soul, and over a philosophical one.

'I find a great delight in opening my heart to you, and in giving you thus an account of my conduct. I will tell you that being appointed also historiographer of France, I write the history of the late fatal war, which did much harm to all the parties, and did good only to the king of Prussia. I wish I could show you what I have wrote upon that subject. I hope I have done justice to the great Duke of Cumberland. My history shall not be the work of a courtier, nor that of a partial man, but that of a lover of mankind.

'As to the tragedy of *Sémiramis,* I'll send it to you within a month or two. I always remember with great pleasure, that I dedicated to you the tender tragedy of *Zaïre.* This *Sémiramis* is quite of another kind. I have tryed, though it was a hard task, to

change our French *petits-maîtres* into Athenian hearers. The transformation is not quite performed; but the piece has met with great applause. It has the fate of moral books that please many, without mending anybody.

'I am now, my dear friend, at the court of king Stanislas, where I have passed some months with all the easiness and cheerfulness that I enjoyed once at Wandsworth: for you must know that king Stanislas is a kind of Falkener. . . . He is indeed the best man alive. But for fear you should take me for a wanderer of courts and a vagabond courtier, I will tell you that I am here with the very same friend whom I never parted from for these twenty years past, the lady du Châtelet, who comments Newton, and is now about printing a French translation of it; she is the friend I mean.

'I have at Paris some enemies, such as Pope had at London; and I despise them as he did. In short, I live as happy as my condition can permit:

Excepto quod non simul esses, caetera laetus!

'I return you a thousand thanks, my dearest and worthy friend. I wish you all the happiness you deserve; and I'll be yours for ever.' [1]

Falkener seems to have given considerable assistance to Voltaire by supplying him with English publications and by looking after his friend's literary interests in England. In 1749 and the years immediately following, Voltaire repeatedly wrote to him on

[1] *Works*, xxxvi. 544. 'Lunéville, at court of Lorraine, Nov. 5, 1748.'

questions concerning the English publication and sale of his works. Some of these letters—which are almost all written in English—contain characteristic sentences and references to men and things in England :—

'Dear Sir,—I have received your new favours, and those of milord Chesterfield. There are many good accounts in the *Annals of Europe*, as well as in the *History of the Late Insurrection in Scotland*, though intermixed with a great number of errors. I wish I could find in every country such materials from whence my duty is to separate the wheat from the chaff; but all seems to me but chaff in the pamphlets: 'tis great pity that your nation is overrun with such prodigious numbers of scandal and scurrilities! However one ought to look upon them as the bad fruits of a very good tree called liberty.

'I have been disturbed these two months and kept from writing my history, which I hope will be the work of the historiografer (*sic*) of the honest man, rather than that of the historiografer (*sic*) to a king. I think truth may be told, when it is wisely told, and I know my master loves it. I am neither a flaterer, nor a writer of satires. I am confident my candour and our old friendship will persuade you to help me with all the materials you can find in your way.

'You will do me the greatest favour if you can send me the relation of admiral Anson's voyage, and the *Ample Disquisition* about the proper means to civilise the Highlander and to improve that country. I don't know the exact title of the little book, which,

they say, is very curious and well written; but it begins with these words, *Ample Disquisition*. Pray, my dear sir, give orders to one of your men to come at it. . . .

'I am from the bottom of my heart sensible of your tender and useful remembrance. You do not forget your old friends, and I'll be attached to you, 'till the last day of my life. Be sure, if I enjoy a better health, I will cross the sea again, in order to see you: it is a consolation I long after. . . . Farewell! my dear sir; my respects to your lady, and my sincere wishes for your son. Your affectionate and tender friend and servant,

'Voltaire.

In 1751 and 1752 Voltaire was busy with the production of his *Siècle de Louis Quatorze*. He wrote to Falkener from Potsdam:—

'Dear Sir,—Fortune that hurries us to and fro in this transient world, attached you to a great prince, and carried me to the court of a great king. But, in these various tossings, my head will never prove giddy enough to forget your friendship. I hope you preserve some kindness for me, and I dare rely upon your good heart.

'I must tell you I have wrote a History of Louis the XIV. You may presume it is written with truth, and not without liberty or freedom. I have been obliged to print it in Berlin at my own expense. I presume four or five hundred copies could see off[2]

[1] *Works*, xxxvii. 8. Paris, March 29, 1749.

[2] Perhaps Voltaire wrote *go off*.

well in your country; the two things I have at heart, truth and liberty, being still dear to your countrymen, raise in me that expectation.

'I dare apply, my dear sir, to your kindness and friendship of old. You may perhaps recommend this business to some honest man, and even to a bookseller, who would be honest enough to merit your favour. I would direct the cargo to him, and he should take a reasonable salary for his trouble. If I can by your favour find any such man, I shall be most obliged to you.

'I hope you are a happy husband and a happy father, as you are a worthy Englishman. Your welfare shall always concern me, as I am for ever, my dear sir, your most faithful friend and obedient servant.' [1]

In the same year Voltaire sent his friend an interesting account of his life at Frederick's Court:—

'Dear Sir,—The printers at Berlin are not so careful and so diligent in working for me, as you are beneficent and ready to favour your friends. They have not yet finished their edition; and I am afraid the winter season will not be convenient to direct to you, by the way of Hamburgh, the tedious lump of books I have threatened you with. However I shall make use of your kind benevolence towards your old friend, as soon as possible. I wish I could carry the *paquet* myself, and enjoy again the consolation to see you, to pay my respects to your family, and be the witness of your happiness.

[1] *Works*, xxxvii. 297. Potsdam, July 27, 1751.

'Methinks fortune uses you as you deserve: you are like to be the Secretary and the confident not of a prince, merely a prince, but of regent of three kingdoms. For my part, I am in my humble way more fortunate than I could ever hope to be. I live with a powerful king, who is no king at all to the few men he converses with him: I enjoy all my time, read, scribble and cultivate my mind. I live free near a king, and I am paid for being happy. We have in our royal and philosophical retreat some foreigners learned and witty, who are very good company. Our days are quiet, and our conversation cheerful.

'I think there is no such a court in the world; for it is not a court at all, except some days, in the winter, dedicated to pageantry and to princely vanity; but in those days of turbulent magnificence, I lock myself up carefully at home. Thus I saunter away my old age, till my distempers, which I humour as much as I can, make me utterly unfit for kings; and then I shall take my leave from the noblest and the most easy slavery. But, should I live with you, I would not part. One may grow old and doat with a friend, but not with a king.

'Farewell, my dear good sir, my dearest friend. I am, from the bottom of my heart, yours for ever.'[1]

Voltaire, whose difficulties in the publishing line were always great, had troubles of the usual kind with his *Siècle de Louis Quatorze*:—

'Dear Sir,—My Louis XIV. is on the Elbe, about a month ago. I don't know whether the *grand*

[1] *Works*, xxxvii. 342. Potsdam, Nov. 27, 1751.

monarch has yet put to sea, to invade Great Britain. But booksellers are greater politicians than Leuis; and I think it is very likely they have got the start of me, by sending my book to London by the way of Rotterdam, while my bale of printed tales is on the Elbe; and so they will reap all the benefit of my labours, according to the noble way of the world.

'My book is prohibited amongst my dear countrymen, because I have spoken the truth; and the delays of cargoes, and the jarring of winds, hinder it from pursuing its journey to England. So, I have to fight with, or against the sea and earth and hell, for booksellers are the hell of writers.

'Be what it will, receive, my dear sir, my cargo of printed sheets, when wind and tide will permit. Do what you please with them; I am resigned. I had rather be read, than be sold: truth is above trade, and reputation above money!

'I am sorry to see that England seems to be sunk into romances. I hope nor you nor your lady care much for them. Yet, there are some written in a lively manner. Nothing is more pleasing in that way, than the humorous performances of our Hamilton, born in France, but of a Scotch family. . . .

'Farewell, my dear worthy friend. You are one of the most aimiable souls that any age has ever produced; and I am for ever yours, with the most tender gratitude.'[1]

On the constant annoyances which attended the publication of his books Voltaire was never weary of dwelling:—

[1] *Works*, xxxvii. 364. Berlin, Jan. 27, 1752.

'My dear and beneficent friend,—I send to you, by the way of Hamburgh, two enormous bales of the scribbling trade. I direct them to our Envoy at Hamburgh, who will dispatch them to you, and put my wares to sea, instead of throwing them into the fire, which might be the case in France, or at Rome.

'My dear friend, I have recourse to your free and generous soul. Some French good patriots, who have read the book, raise a noble clamour against me, for having praised Marlborough and Eugène; and some good churchmen damn me for having turned a little into ridicule our *jansénisme* and *molinisme*.

'If our prejudiced people are fools, booksellers and printers or book-jobbers are rogues. I am like to be damned in France, and cheated by the Dutch; the old German honesty is gone.

'Booksellers of all regions are the same. I shall lose all the fruits of my labours and expences; but I rely on your kindness. You may cause some books to be bound, and choose an honest man, who will give them to the chief readers of your nation. I entreat you to present His Royal Highness with one of these volumes, and to give some *exemplaires* or copies to those of your friends you will think fit. The bookseller you will choose may do what he pleases with the remainder, and sell them as best as he can, provided he sells them not before Easter; it is all I require of him.

'I beg of you a thousand pardons for so much trouble, and I wish the book may procure you a pleasure equal to my importunities. My *ultimatum* is then to tease you with the reading of the book; to

beg of you to give one to His Royal Highness the duke, and to your friends; to commit the rest into the hands of any man you will think proper to choose and to forgive my cumbersome follies. Burn the book, in case you should yawn in reading it; but do not forget your old friend, who will be attached to you till the day of his doom.

'My best respects to your lady, good wishes for your children; my tender affection and everlasting friendship to you.

'Voltaire.'[1]

From Voltaire's other letters to Falkener it will be sufficient to cite one very Voltairian sentence:—

'I hope, my dear and worthy friend, my worthy Englishman, you have received my lord Bolingbroke's vindication against priests, whom I have hated, hate, and I shall hate till doomsday.'[2]

Sir Everard Falkener died in 1758. Voltaire did not hear the news till the following year, and he was much distressed by it. As his very affectionate feeling for his old friend never died out, he was delighted in 1774 to give a very cordial welcome to Falkener's two sons at Ferney. Sitting between them, at his own table, Voltaire took each of them by the hand and exclaimed: *Mon Dieu, que je me trouve heureux de me voir placé entre deux Falkeners.*[3]

There is one curious little episode which, through Falkener, brings Voltaire's name for a moment into

[1] *Works*, xxxvii. 392. Berlin, March 27, 1752.
[2] *Id.* 527. [3] *Lettres Inédites*, i. 75.

connection with English political history. Towards the close of 1745 Voltaire received from Falkener a letter in which he thought he could read that England, anxious to end the miserably mismanaged war, was desirous to come to terms with France. With the hankering for diplomatic employment which he more than once displayed, Voltaire proposed to the French ministers that he, the intimate friend of the Duke of Cumberland's private secretary, should be sent to England to act as agent in arranging terms of peace.[1] It would have been curious to see Voltaire negotiating in a semi-official way at the Court of St. James's; all the more curious and piquant when one remembers another incident with which Voltaire was connected in that very same year. When Charles Stuart landed in Scotland in 1745, there was talk of a projected French descent on some part of the south coast of England. This came to nothing; but France contributed a few men and a little money to the Scotch undertaking. The Duke of Perth's brother, Lord Drummond, an officer in the French service, landed at Montrose, and published a manifesto in which he declared that, by order of the King of France, he had come to help the Stuart Prince. This manifesto was written by Voltaire, as he himself acknowledges.[2] Surely Voltaire took a rather odd way of showing his

[1] Lepan's *Vie Politique, littéraire et morale de Voltaire*, p. 85 2nd Edition).

[2] *Works*, i. 90. The manifesto itself is printed in *Works*, xxiii. 203.

gratitude to his old friend George the Second, the generous patron whose name had headed the list of subscribers to the *Henriade*, the King who had received at his Court the young French poet unjustly exiled from his own country. But, to be sure, all that was nearly twenty years ago.

In 1761 Voltaire was engaged on an edition of the Works of Corneille, for the benefit of Corneille's grand-niece. He sought for subscribers in England, and appealed to the great English minister whose name was for Frenchmen the reminder of failure and disaster in the Old World and the New. In a letter of mingled French and English, Voltaire wrote to Pitt :—

'*Au Chateau de ferney, près de Genève*, 19 *Juillet*, 1761.

'Monsieur,—While you weight the interests of england and france, y^r^ great mind may at one time reconcile Corneille with Shakespear. Y^r^ name at the head of Subscribers shall be the greatest honour the letters can receive, t'is worthy of the greatest ministers to protect the greatest writers. j dare not ask the name of the King; but I am assuming enough, to desire earnestly so great a favour.

'Je suis avec un respect infini pour votre personne et pour vos grandes actions,

'Monsieur,

'Votre très humble et très obéissant serviteur,

'Voltaire,

'gentilhome ord. de la chambre du roy

[1] *Correspondence of the Earl of Chatham*, ii. 131.

Pitt replied in solemn complimentary style :—

'The pressure of business is but a feeble reason for having deferred answering the honour of a letter from M. de Voltaire, and on so interesting a subject. For who so insensible to the true spirit of poetry, as not to admire the works and respect the posterity of the great Corneille? Or what more flattering than to second, in any manner, those pious cares, offered to the Manes of the founder of French tragedy by the genius who was reserved to perfect it?

'I feel the high value of the favourable sentiments you are so good as to express on my subject, and am happy in this occasion of assuring you of the distinguished consideration with which I have the honour to be etc.,

'W. Pitt.' [1]

To Lord Lyttelton, also, Voltaire applied. Voltaire had been rather offended by some censure which Lyttelton had passed on his writings in the *Dialogues of the Dead*. Lyttelton, in his imaginary dialogue between Boileau and Pope, had hinted that Voltaire was of necessity an exile from France, and had blamed the literary freedom with which Voltaire expressed himself on solemn and serious subjects. Voltaire, seldom patient under criticism and not at all liking Lyttelton's observations, wrote him a letter of remonstrance :—

'*At my castle of Tornex in Burgundy.*

'I have read the ingenious *Dialogues of the Dead*. I find that I am an *exile*, and guilty of some excesses

[1] *Works*, xli. 428. Sept. 4, 1761.

in writing. I am obliged (and perhaps for the honour of my country) to say I am not an exile, because I have not committed the excesses the author of the *Dialogues* imputes to me.

'Nobody raised his voice higher than mine in favour of the rights of human kind, yet I have not exceeded even in that virtue.

'I am not settled in Switzerland, as he believes. I live on my own lands in France; retreat is becoming to old age, and more becoming in one's own possessions. If I enjoy a little country-house near Geneva, my manors and my castles are in Burgundy; and if my king has been pleased to confirm the privileges of my lands, which are free from all tributes, I am the more indebted to my king.

'If I were an *exile*, I should not have obtained, from my court, many a passport for English noblemen. The service I rendered to them entitles me to the justice I expect from the noble author.

'As for religion, I think, and I hope he thinks with me, that God is neither a presbyterian, nor a lutheran, nor of the low church, nor of the high church, but God is the father of the noble author and mine.

'I am, with respect, his most humble servant,

'Voltaire,

'gentleman of the King's Chamber.'[1]

Voltaire's seignorial manner, his address 'at my castle of Tornex,' and his reference to his manors and castles in Burgundy are more than a trifle

[1] *Works*, xl. 534.

ludicrous, and exposed themselves to easy ridicule. Horace Walpole, writing to Sir Horace Mann at Florence, says: 'Voltaire has been charmingly absurd. He who laughed at Congreve for despising the rank of author and affecting the gentleman, set out post for a hovel he has in France, to write from thence, and style himself *Gentleman of the Bedchamber*, to Lord Lyttelton, who, in his *Dialogues of the Dead*, had called him an exile. He writes in English, and not a sentence is tolerable English.'[1] In that last respect Horace Walpole's own letters too often resemble Voltaire's. Lord Lyttelton, sensibly making no attempt at facetious or sarcastic retort, answered Voltaire's letter with all becoming seriousness :—

'Sir,—I have received the honour of your letter dated from your castle at Tornex in Burgundy, by which I find I was guilty of an error in calling your retirement an *exile*. When another edition shall be made of my *Dialogues*, either in English or in French, I will take care that this error shall be corrected; and I am very sorry I was not apprized of it sooner, that I might have corrected it in the first edition of a French translation, just published under my inspection in London. To do you justice is a duty I owe to truth and myself; and you have a much better title to it than from the *passports* you say you have procured for English noblemen: you are entitled to it, sir, by the high sentiments of respect I have for you, which are not paid to the privileges you tell me your

[1] H. Walpole's *Letters*, iii. 380. March 3, 1761.

king has confirmed to your lands, but to the *noble talents* God has given you, and the superior rank you hold in the republic of letters. The favours done you by your sovereign are an honour to *him*, but add little lustre to the name of Voltaire.

'I entirely agree with you *that God is the father of all mankind*; and should think it blasphemy to confine his goodness to a sect; nor do I believe that any of his creatures are good in his sight if they do not extend their benevolence to all his creation. These opinions I rejoice to see in your works, and shall be very happy to be convinced that the liberty of your thoughts and your pen, upon subjects of philosophy and religion, never exceeded the bounds of this generous principle, which is authorised by revelation as much as by reason; or that you disapprove, in your hours of sober reflection, any irregular sallies of fancy, which cannot be *justified*, though they may be *excused*, by the vivacity and fire of a great genius.'[1]

Voltaire, easily mollified, wrote, not from his Burgundy castle, but from his home at Ferney, asking Lyttelton's name and subscription for the edition of Corneille :—

'My Lord,—My esteem for you is so great, that j presume the name of Corneille shall be honour'd with your name. J dare sai such an attonement for the

[1] *Works*, xli. 44. These letters of Voltaire and Lyttelton are undated, but belong to 1760. Lyttelton's *Dialogues* were published in 1759.

little displeasure you had caus'd to me, is a favour which j'll ressent great deal more than my little pain.

'Je suis avec bien du respect,

'My Lord,

'Votre tres humble et tres

'obeissant serviteur,

'Voltaire.

Horace Walpole, who laughed so lightly at Voltaire's rather ridiculous dignities, had himself some correspondence with Voltaire which ended in a very abrupt and unpleasant manner. Voltaire and Walpole never met; Walpole was only a small boy at Eton while Voltaire was in England. But Voltaire in 1768 heard of the publication of the *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard III.*, and wrote begging Walpole to send him a copy. 'Fifty years ago,' he said, 'I made a vow to doubt; I venture to ask you to help me in accomplishing my vow. I am perhaps unknown to you, though in former days I was honoured with the friendship of the two brothers,' thus referring to his old acquaintance with Sir Robert Walpole and his brother Horatio. Walpole sent the book for which Voltaire asked, and along with it he also sent his *Castle of Otranto*, though in the Preface

[1] Sir R. J. Phillimore's *Memoirs of Lord Lyttelton*, ii. 558. July 19, 1761. It is a pity that the orthography of Voltaire's English letters in the collected editions of his works is generally 'edited.' It is only in letters gathered from scattered sources, or quoted first-hand from Voltaire's original MS., that his peculiarities of spelling, &c., can still be seen.

to this story he had attacked Voltaire's criticisms on Shakespeare. At the same time he wrote to Voltaire :—

'I have a more intimate dependence on you than you suspect. Without knowing it, you have been my master, and perhaps the sole merit that may be found in my writings is owing to my having studied yours ; so far, Sir, am I from living in that state of barbarism and ignorance with which you tax me when you say *que vous m'êtes peut-être inconnu*. . . . But, Sir, if I can tell you nothing good of myself, I can at least tell you something bad ; and, after the obligation you have conferred on me by your letter, I should blush if you heard it from anybody but myself. I had rather incur your indignation than deceive you. Some time ago I took the liberty to find fault in print with the criticisms you had made on our Shakespeare. This freedom, and no wonder, never came to your knowledge. It was in a preface to a trifling romance, much unworthy of your regard, but which I shall send you, because I cannot accept even the honour of your correspondence, without making you judge whether I deserve it. I might retract, I might beg your pardon; but having said nothing but what I thought, nothing illiberal or unbecoming a gentleman, it would be treating you with ingratitude and impertinence, to suppose that you would either be offended with my remarks, or pleased with my recantation. You are as much above wanting flattery, as I am above offering it to you. You would despise me, and I should despise myself—a sacrifice I cannot make, Sir, even to you.'[1]

[1] H. Walpole's *Letters*, v. 109. June 21, 1768.

Voltaire sent a reply, saying a few complimentary things of Walpole's *Historic Doubts*, and justifying his own observations on Shakespeare in terms which have been already quoted. Walpole continued the correspondence in the usual tone of eighteenth-century flattery:—

'Whatever opinion I may have of Shakespeare,' he wrote, 'I should think him to blame, if he could have seen the letter you have done me the honour to write to me, and yet not conform to the rules you have there laid down. When he lived, there had not been a Voltaire both to give laws to the stage, and to show on what good sense those laws were founded. . . . The admirable letter you have been so good as to send me, is a proof that you are one of those truly great and rare men who know at once how to conquer and to pardon.'

All this was very fine; but Walpole soon discovered that Voltaire was neither writing nor acting with perfect sincerity. On the very day on which Voltaire lavished upon Walpole so many complimentary remarks in regard to Shakespeare, he wrote also to the Duchess de Choiseul, saying that he cared nothing whether Walpole justified the tyrant Richard III. or not, but that he did care a great deal to think that Walpole gave his '*grossier bouffon* Shakespeare' the preference over Racine and Corneille. 'The Duchess,' notes Walpole, 'sent me Voltaire's letter, which gave me such contempt for his disingenuity

that I dropped all correspondence with him.'[1] The excessive and ridiculous personal flattery, which is one of the characteristics of Voltaire's private correspondence, exposed him only too often to similar charges of falsehood and treachery.

Voltaire had been on friendly terms with Chesterfield in England, though no details of their intimacy remain. The only glimpse of personal contact between the two men belongs to later years. In 1741, Chesterfield, travelling on the Continent for the benefit of his health, fell in with Voltaire at Brussels. In the few days which they spent together, Voltaire read to Chesterfield parts of his new tragedy of *Mahomet*.[2] Chesterfield, writing in French the following year to the younger Crébillon, while admitting the beauty of the versification and the brilliancy of the thoughts of Voltaire's play, adopted an orthodoxy which sits rather curiously upon him, and lamented the great freedom of expression which Voltaire allowed himself. But Chesterfield was always very enthusiastic in his comments on Voltaire's literary qualities. 'All he does charms me; the most beautiful verse in the world, and brilliant and just thoughts. I ask no more; *non paucis offendar maculis*.'[3] And Chesterfield wrote to his son: 'I am extremely glad to hear that you are soon to have Voltaire at Manheim:

[1] H. Walpole's *Short Notes of my Life; Letters*, i. lxxvi.
[2] Maty's *Memoirs of Lord Chesterfield*, i. 100.
[3] Lord Mahon's *Letters of Chesterfield*, iii. 389. July 25, 1750.

immediately upon his arrival, pray make him a thousand compliments from me. I admire him most exceedingly; and whether as an epic, dramatic, or lyric poet, or prose writer, I think I justly apply to him the *Nil molitur inepte.*' Voltaire himself sent to Chesterfield his *Siècle de Louis XIV.*, and Chesterfield was profuse in his thanks and praises. It is worth remarking that Chesterfield spoke of this book with just as much admiration and vivacity in his correspondence with other friends; for this is proof that his expressions to Voltaire himself were not of set purpose written in that tone of flattery which he knew that Voltaire so greedily and indiscriminatingly enjoyed. He wrote in French to Voltaire:—

'Allow me to thank you for the pleasure and the instruction which I have received from your History of the Age of Louis the Fourteenth. I have only read it four times as yet, for I wished to forget it a little before reading it the fifth time, but to forget it I find impossible. . . . What special gratitude I feel towards you for the light in which you have placed the follies and the passions of the sects! The arms which you use against these fools or impostors are the right and fitting ones; to use others would be to imitate them; they must be attacked by ridicule and punished by scorn. And speaking of these madmen, I enclose you a piece which the late Dr. Swift devoted to them. I think you will not dislike it. It has never been printed, you will easily guess why; but it is genuine. I have the original in Swift's own handwriting. His

Jupiter, on the judgment-day, treats them very much as you do, and as they deserve to be treated.

'For the rest, I will frankly tell you that I am in a difficulty about you, and that I cannot decide what it is that I really wish from you. When I read your last History, I wish you always to be a historical writer; when I read your *Rome Sauvée*, I would have you to be always a poet. I confess, however, that there is still one history waiting to be written, worthy of your pen and of your pen alone. Long ago you gave us the story of Europe's greatest madman (I beg your pardon if I cannot say Europe's greatest hero). You have just given us the history of Europe's greatest king. Give us now the history of Europe's greatest and most honest man, whom I should think I was degrading if I called a King.[1] He is constantly before your eyes, and your task would be a most easy one. His glory is so great that you would not have to draw upon your poetical invention; his fame can rest in perfect safety upon historical truth. He has nothing to ask from his historian but the fulfillment of the historian's first duty, *Ne quid falsi dicere audeat, ne quid veri non audeat.*

'Farewell, Sir; I see very well that I shall have to admire you more and more every day, but I am also very certain that my feelings of esteem and attachment for you can never be greater than now they are.'[2]

[1] The madman, the king, and the honest man, are Charles the Twelfth, Louis the Fourteenth, and Frederick the Great. In the light of later events, it is very odd to hear Chesterfield recommending Voltaire to write the life of Frederick of Prussia.

[2] Lord Mahon's *Letters of Chesterfield*, iv. 35. August 27, 1752. The verses which Chesterfield enclosed in his letter were Swift's terrible lines entitled *The Day of Judgment*.

One letter from Voltaire, written when he and Chesterfield were both old and sickly men, shows their friendship still existing in far later years :—

'*Au Château de Ferney, près de Genève*
'*le 24 Octobre*, 1771.

'The Count of Huntington has honoured me by visiting my hermitage. I did not write to you; I was too much engaged in listening to him. I try to console myself for his departure by writing to thank you for having sent him to me. He pleased me by speaking much about you, and I especially asked him for news of you; for I troubled myself little about your aldermen, your sheriffs, and all such annoyances.

'Enjoy an honourable and happy old age, after having passed through the trials and experiences of life. Enjoy your genius and understanding, and preserve your bodily health. Only one of your five senses is impaired, and Lord Huntington assures me that you have a good stomach, which is well worth a pair of ears.[1] Perhaps it might be for me to decide which is the saddest state, to be deaf, to be blind, or to have no digestion. I can judge from experience of these three conditions; but I have long ceased to venture to lay down the law on trifles, and much more on serious matters. I confine myself to the belief that if the sun shines on the beautiful house you have built yourself, you will have tolerable moments in it, and at our age one can hope for nothing more. Cicero wrote a beautiful treatise on old age, but his

[1] Chesterfield's deafness forms the basis of Voltaire's story, *Les Oreilles du Comte de Chesterfield et le Chapelain Goudman*, written in 1775.

own life was not an illustration of his doctrines, and his last years were very unhappy. You have lived a longer and happier life than his. You have had nothing to do with either perpetual Dictators or with Triumvirs. Yours has been, and continues to be, one of the most desirable fortunes in the great lottery where prizes are so rare, and where the grand prize of continual happiness has never been gained by anyone. Your philosophy has never been upset by chimaeras which have sometimes confused very good brains. You have never been in any way a charlatan or the dupe of a charlatan, and to my mind this is a very uncommon merit, and one which contributes to the shadow of happiness which is all this short life allows us to enjoy.

'Receive kindly my sincere and useless good-wishes, my regrets that I cannot pass any of my days with you, and my affectionate and respectful attachment.

'The sick old man of Ferney,

'V

In 1763, Garrick left England for a tour on the Continent. Garrick was acquainted with the French actor Camp, and in December of that year Voltaire wrote to Camp saying that if Garrick could make his way to Ferney he would find admirers there who made as much of his person as of his talents.[2] Camp reported this to Garrick, and Garrick himself wrote to Voltaire:—

[1] *Letters and Works of Chesterfield.* Edited by Lord Mahon, v. 424.

[2] *Private Correspondence of Garrick* (London, 1831–32), ii. 421.

'Sir,—I think myself greatly honoured by a paragraph in a letter which you were pleased some time ago to write to Mr. Camp, at Lyons, and had it been in my power to have followed my inclinations, I should have paid my respects at Ferney long before this time; but a violent bilious fever most unluckily seized me on the road, and confined me to my bed five weeks at Munich, and now my affairs are so circumstanced that I am obliged to go to Paris as expeditiously as my present weak state of health will permit me. You were pleased to tell a gentleman that you had a theatre ready to receive me; I should with great pleasure have exerted what little talents I have, and could I have been the means of bringing our Shakespeare into some favour with Mr. de Voltaire, I should have been happy indeed. No enthusiastic missionary, who had converted the Emperor of China to his religion, would have been prouder than I, could I have reconciled the first genius of Europe to our dramatic faith. I am, Sir, your most humble and most obedient servant,

'D. Garrick.

'P.S.—Though I have called Shakespeare our dramatic faith, yet I must do my countrymen the justice to declare, that notwithstanding their deserved admiration of his astonishing powers, they are not bigoted to his errors, as some French journalists have so confidently affirmed.'[1]

It seems that Garrick was a little doubtful whether Voltaire quite believed in the genuineness of his

[1] Garrick's *Private Correspondence*, ii. 362. Undated.

excuses. Voltaire may have thought that Garrick could not forgive all that he had said of Shakespeare. However, a Dr. Samuel Sharp, himself one of Voltaire's English visitors in 1765, wrote from Geneva in that year to Garrick:—

'I am just come from Mons. Voltaire's, and can give you the fullest assurance that neither your letter nor any other part of your conduct has given him the least umbrage. There was no company at dinner but myself: his nieces and nephews talked more and louder than other men and women usually do in France; however, I every now and then, as I sat next to him, got hold of his ears, and our chief topic was our English actor. When I signified to him that I should write this evening to Mr. Garrick, and that it would be the greatest pleasure I could do you, to say he was in good health; "No, Sir," said he, "do not write an untruth, but tell him, *Je suis plein d'estime pour lui.*" When I represented how mortified you was in having lost the opportunity of paying him your respects, his answer was such, that I am persuaded you never offended.' [1]

Garrick sent his Ode on Shakespeare to Voltaire; but when Voltaire made his last furious outburst against Shakespeare, Garrick wrote to Madame Necker:—

'I have left no room for Voltaire and Shakespeare. There are rods preparing for the old gentleman by several English wits; his letter to the French

[1] Garrick's *Private Correspondence*, i. 196. August 18, 1765.

Academy is no addition to his genius or his generosity, and his errors are without end. I pity his ill-placed anger.'[1]

Voltaire was disappointed in never meeting another very differently distinguished Englishman. In 1764, Hume was in Paris, and Voltaire would have liked to have seen him at *Les Délices*. From Paris, Hume wrote to a friend:—

'When I arrived here, all M. Voltaire's friends told me of the regard he always expressed for me; that some advances on my part were due to his age, and would be well taken. I accordingly wrote him a letter, in which I expressed the esteem which are (*sic*) undoubtedly due to his talents; and among other things I said, that if I were not confined to Paris by public business, I should have a great ambition to pay him a visit at Geneva.'[2]

Voltaire himself wrote to the Marquise du Deffant, expressing his wish to speak to Hume, but above all to listen to him. The two men, however, never met.

The name of Hume naturally suggests that of Robertson. Robertson sent his *Charles the Fifth* to Voltaire, and Voltaire replied in a letter full of admiration.

One distinguished Englishman refused all intercourse with Voltaire. The *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* excited Voltaire's admiration, and he made more than one attempt to open up a friendly

[1] Garrick's *Private Correspondence*, ii. 190. Nov. 10, 1776.
[2] Burton's *Life and Correspondence of Hume*, ii. 184.

correspondence with Gray; but Gray declined. Gray admired Voltaire's genius, but detested a man whom he looked upon as an enemy to religion. In 1771, Gray's friend Norton Nicholls was about to visit the Continent. Before he left England, Gray said to him: 'I have one thing to beg of you, which you must not refuse. Do not go to visit Voltaire; no one knows the mischief that man will do.' Nicholls readily promised, but asked how his visit to Voltaire could be of any possible significance. 'Every tribute to such a man signifies,' was the reply;[1] and there was no tribute from Gray.

With another English friend, whose name is now entirely forgotten, Voltaire had a correspondence of considerable bulk. A few letters from Voltaire to one George Keate occur in the collected editions of Voltaire's Works; others, which are here printed from the original manuscripts, have never appeared in any edition of Voltaire. Keate, who was born about 1729, the year in which Voltaire's visit to England ended, was a wealthy and kindly man, a member of various learned societies, and much devoted to literature in general and to poetry in particular. As a young Englishman spending some years at Geneva, he gained the acquaintance and friendship of Voltaire, with whom in later years he continued to correspond. He produced various descriptive poems of the usual eighteenth century kind, and managed to connect

[1] Gray's *Works*, v. 32. (Ed. Mitford, 1843.)

Voltaire's name with two of his works. One of these, a prose treatise on the History of the Republic of Geneva, was dedicated to Voltaire; the other, an epistle entitled *Ferney*, was in verse, and though it was addressed to Voltaire it introduced a eulogy of Shakespeare. Voltaire evidently treated Keate with much personal kindness at Ferney, and his letters to him—some of them in French, others in English—are full of characteristic sentences, while they also afford very flagrant examples of the unrestrained and ridiculous flattery which Voltaire lavished with indifference on the greatest and the smallest of his friends.

In the early stage of the Seven Years' War, Voltaire wrote to Keate:—

'I snatch, my dear sir, a moment from my fever and from all my ills to thank you for your remembrance of me. You are going from Court to Court, and I sit in the chimney-corner in my little hermitage. We both do what is proper to our time of life.

'So your Admiral Bing has been sentenced to death, in spite of Marshal Richelieu's fine letter. Your sailors are not polite. If you wish to see fine battles, Germans killed by Germans and a few towns pillaged, that little amusement may be yours in spring if you care to have it. It will requite you for the dull uniformity of life at Geneva.

'remember in y^r^ journeys, dear S^r^ y^r^ most humble serv^t^ the Switzer-man.

'V.'[1]

[1] *Brit. Mus. Add. MSS.* 30991, f. 4. Monrion, Feb. 1757. The original is in French, except the last paragraph.

Voltaire's next letter to Keate is rather oddly addressed: 'to m^r Keat, esq: nandos coffee-house, London:—

'J'ay toujours my dear Sir, des remerciments a vous faire. voicy la premiere fois qu'on a réduit un imprimé au manuscrit pour l'envoyer par la poste. y^r manuscri't testifies that a great emperess was a whore. as to the barbarien and barbarous law-giver Peter the Great, he was much superior to moses and romulus and theseus; at least he was born in better times.

'we are not born in very good times, since wise and learned nations spill more blood and squander away more money for a little corner of acadia, than whole acadia shall be ever worth. Martin says the world is a sad pack of madmen. j am happy to have known a man so wise and good naturd as you are. Such caracters attone for the ugly and covetous fierceness of others.

'j will not fail to send you the creation of peter the great so soon as the book shall be printed.

'j am forever with the utmost gratitude y^r

'V.'[1]

In the following letters, Voltaire leaves politics for literature:—

'You are not, dear Sir, like most of y^r countrymen, who forget their friendships contracted in terra so soon as they are pent up in their island. You remember me. I am indeed y^r friend, since you are

[1] *Brit. Mus. Add. MSS.* 30991, f. 7. Aux Délices, July 27, 1757. In no edition of Voltaire's Works.

a man without prejudices, a man of every country. Had I not fixed the seat of my retreat in the free corner of Geneva, I would certainly live in the free kingdom of England; for though I do not like the monstrous irregularities of Shakespear, though I admire but some lively and masterly strokes in his performances, yet I am confident no body in the world looks with a greater veneration on y^r^ good philosophers, on the croud of y^r^ good authors; and I am these thirty years the disciple of y^r^ way of thinking. Y^r^ nation is at once a people of warriours and of philosophers. You are now at the pitch of glory, in regard to publick affairs; but I know not whether you have preserv'd the reputation y^r^ island enjoy'd in point of literature when Addison, Congreve, Pope, Swift, were alive. However, you kan not be so low as we are. Poor France, at the present time, has neither navy, nor money, nor plate, nor fame, nor wit. We are at the ebb of all. . . .

'Pray incase some good book appears into y^r^ world, let me be inform'd of it.

'Adieu, mon cher jeune philosophe, je compte sur votre souvenir, et je vous aimerai toujours.

'Y for ever,

'Voltaire.'[1]

The following interesting letter—the original is in French—does not appear in Voltaire's printed correspondence:—

'*Aux Délices, April* 16, 1760.

'It is not, my dear sir, because you write to me in English that I confine myself to replying in

[1] *Works*, xl. 283. Aux Délices, Jan. 16, 1760.

French, but I am not able to write and am obliged to dictate my letter. I have not yet seen your fellow-countryman who was to bring me your poem on Ancient and Modern Rome; you may be sure that he is the traveller whom I most of all desire to see. I await with much impatience the description of the contrast between Rome the Great and Rome the Holy; between the Rome of the Tituses and the Trajans, and the Rome of the Pope and the Cardinals; between the Capitol which saw the triumph of Paullus Emilius and the Capitol where friars say mass.

'You do much honour to Geneva, a town which is not worth ancient Rome or Rome of the present day. There is far less liberty at Geneva than in England; the place is really a tedious convent, though there are some very sensible people in it. It was only to console myself for the impossibility of living in London that I chose the neighbourhood of this little place as the spot of my retreat.

'I do not wish to fall out with you for the sake of Shakespeare. I agree with you that nature did much for him; nature gave him all her diamonds, but in that age it was impossible that they should be polished ones. What is it to me to know that a tragic writer has genius, if none of his pieces can be played in any country in the world? Cimabuë had genius for painting, but his pictures are worth nothing; Lully had very great genius for music, but his airs are sung nowhere in Europe except in France, and even we are beginning to be disgusted with them.

'The gardens of Alcinous were very beautiful in their own time; nowadays they would hardly form the garden of a comfortable farmer.

'No one is more sensible than I am of the beautiful passages to be found here and there in Shakespeare; but I will say to you with Pope, that a nose and a chin are not enough to make a beautiful face; there must be regularity in the whole.

'If Addison could have put more warmth into his *Cato*, he would have been the writer for me. You still have a Thompson (*sic*) whose verses are not amiss, but his is an iced genius; Oteway (*sic*) had more warmth, but one sees that he takes Shakespeare for his model and does not at all come near him. I cannot endure the mixture of tragedy and of buffoonery; it seems to me monstrous. Of course I am not giving you my opinion as being good in itself, but as being my own; I expound my taste as God has given it to me. We are all seated at table and each one eats and drinks what he pleases; I will not quarrel with my neighbour if he likes beef and I prefer mutton.

'I have ordered from England all Midleton's (*sic*) works; I have a passionate liking for that man. Warburton, too, seems to me very learned, but I have only the two first volumes of the *Legation of Moses* and do not know how to procure the two last. I am very curious to know how he proceeds in order to show that ignorance of the immortality of the soul demonstrates that our lives are guided by God himself. He will easily prove that the Jews did not expect any other life and that they limited their ideas of happiness to lending money on interest whenever they could; but he will prove nothing more, and indeed we will let him off the rest.

Adieu, Sir; I bore you, but I love you with all my heart. 'Yr for ever

'V.'[1]

The following eight letters of Voltaire to Keate, and three or four fragments addressed by Voltaire to his English friend, are also absent from all the editions. Voltaire had wished that Keate's work on Geneva, which appeared in 1761, should be translated into French, but the plan failed. Voltaire wrote from Ferney:—

'My dear *free Briton*, you have worked for the ungrateful. The Genevans whom you have praised so much appear to think that you have not praised them enough; I had had your too good book translated, but they have refused permission to print it. Reserve your praises for your own nation, which merits them. England is becoming the first nation in the world; navy, commerce, agriculture, philosophy, liberty, you have them all; and you have not the pedantry and mock politics of petty republics.

'Love Corneille, and I will be reconciled with Shakespeare.

'La poste part, je n'ai que le temps de vous embrasser et de vous dire que je vous aimerai toute ma vie.'[2]

Among Keate's poetical efforts was an *Epistle from Lady Jane Grey to Lord Guilford Dudley*. This piece was dedicated to the Dowager Baroness Hervey,

[1] *Brit. Mus. Add. MSS.* 30991, f. 15. The last three English words are in Voltaire's own handwriting.

[2] *Id.* f. 21. July 22, 1761.

whom Voltaire had known in England as Lady Hervey:—

'*Aux Délices, July* 8, 1762.

'Dear S^r^,—had lady Grey writ in her days in the manner she writes after her death, all england would have rais'd in her favour against that pious murderess queen mary. j hope you will be Secretary to all the english queens. they shall become with the help of y^r^ pen, the darling of the nation. j thank you heartily for that charming copy of verse. j had the honour to see thirty years ago the lady y^r^ epistle is inscrib'd too. She has pass'd from the throne of beauty, to that of wit. if she remembers me, j pray you to present her with my humble respect. rank me good S^r^ amongst y^r^ admirers and faithfull friends,

'Voltaire.

'On imprime pierre Corneille avec les commentaires. cet auteur a de grands defauts et de grandes beautés. Mais il est moins fou que votre Shakespear parcequ'il vivait dans un siècle plus sage.'[1]

Keate, who was indefatigable in boring Voltaire with his productions, sent him in 1763 a poem on *The Alps*. Voltaire replied:—

'I am resolved to tell you directly how much I have been charmed by your poem. I love my mountains much better since you have beautified them. You give pleasantness to the horrible; it seems that Milton's soul has passed into your body. My hair is actually of the colour of the snows and ice which you

[1] *Brit. Mus. Add. MSS.* 30991, f. 25.

have painted so well, but the reading of your works gives warmth to my frost, and with similar warmth I shall be till the end of my life,

'Yr true servant and friend,

'Voltaire.'[1]

Keate's poetical rage next fastened on a description of Voltaire's own home, *Les Délices*:—

'My lot is a pleasant one, my dear Sir; I am almost entirely blind for four or five months of the year. It is unjust that I who am so far from equalling Milton should be absolutely blind as he was. But I am blind only when the snows cover the Alps and Mount Jura, which you have sung of so well. And this blindness has deprived me of the pleasure of reading for myself the beautiful verses with which you have honoured *Les Délices*, but I fortunately met an Englishman who read them to me, and shared my admiration of them.

'I believe I shall soon be obliged to leave *Les Délices*, which your celebration has made so dear to me. In spring, summer, and autumn I must be at my Ferney estate, which I am cultivating and making the best of, and in winter I need a very warm room. And, after all, it makes very little difference whether after one's death one is eaten by the worms of Geneva or the worms of Gex.

'Be certain, Sir, that as long as I live I shall be attached to you with a gratitude which is equal to the esteem I feel for you.

'Voltaire.'[2]

[1] *Brit. Mus. Add. MSS.* 30991, f. 26. Ferney, July 29, 1763. In French, except the last five words.

[2] *Id.* f. 28. Ferney, Nov. 14, 1764. In French.

No amount of eulogy was too much for Voltaire to offer or for Keate to receive:—

'It is only a few days ago, Sir, that I received your beautiful verses on the death of Mademoiselle Ciber [Cibber]. They gave me so much pleasure that if I was dead I would beg you to do as much for me; but I can assure you that I had much rather receive your works in this world than in the next. You are very fortunate to be occupied with the charms of poetry, while most of your fellow-countrymen are only devoted to party-spirit; the muses comfort the soul, and quarrels distress it.

'Geneva is to the best of its ability the *gille* of England. It tries to imitate England as the frog wished to be like the ox. Its quarrels are petty and everlasting; the English would have taken all America in less time than is needed to reconcile the people of Geneva among themselves.

'Adieu, Sir; I shall soon require an epitaph, and I recommend myself to you.

'v. t. h. o. s^{t}

'V.'[1]

Ferney of course received Keate's metrical celebration:—

'At last, sir, I have received and read the beautiful verses [on Ferney] with which you honour me, and I still know English well enough to feel all the charms of your work. You could not console me better for your absence. It seems to me that your verses are a good deal in the taste of Thompson (*sic*), but I think

[1] *Brit. Mus. Add. MSS.* 30991, f. 32. Sept. 23, 1766. In French.

you are much superior to him in the amenity which you diffuse over all your writings. At the present time you are almost the only Englishman who upholds the honour of the muses.

'I will not fail to send you without delay the very badly printed collection [of Voltaire's own works], which does not deserve the place in your library which you wish to give it.

Nardi parvus onix eliciet cadum.

But my *cadus* is not worth your *nardus*.

'I am ashamed of having written so many verses, and, thank God, at my time of life there is a renunciation of dangerous passions.

Versus et caetera ludicra pono.

But the fewer French verses I make, the more I like your English ones.

'Believe me that I am very sensible of certain natural and vigorous beauties in Shakespeare. If his tragedies are not in the French taste, I am charmed by some of their details. It is the same with the Spanish Lopez de Véga. If there had been more warmth and interest in Addison's *Cato*, that play would, to my mind, be the first in Europe.

'Adieu, my very dear colleague, and accept kindly the tender embrace of a sick and solitary old man.

'V.'[1]

Keate's poem on Ancient and Modern Rome was somewhat late in reaching Ferney during the con-

[1] *Brit. Mus. Add. MSS.* 30991, f. 42. Ferney, May 17, 1768. In French.

fused war-time. When it did arrive, Voltaire, quoting from it here and there, wrote to Keate:—

'to pluck its honours off and sink it down
to teach an awfull moral in the dust

y^r honours, good and amiable s^r shall not be pluck't down, y^r muse shall not be laid in the dust.

'allow'd a little space
to shine, attract, then fade, and be forgot

by all the saints of rome, you shall not be forgot. j see in y^r work Truth clad in her solemn garments. j'd rather admire Rome in y^r verses than at the pope's feet. j was long depriv'd of y^r poem thanks to this damnd war. at last it was convey'd to me. war ought not to be waged against muses. A word again. The description of poor Laura buriing herself in the geole of Virgin Mary [a convent] is charming. Be sure Dear S^r no man entertains a greater esteem for you in england than j do on the borders of my lake.

'j am forever y^r servant admirer and friend

'Voltaire.'[1]

Voltaire continued to correspond with Keate till September 1777, less than a year before his own death. In 1773, after he had received from Keate a dramatic poem entitled *The Monument in Arcadia*, Voltaire wrote:—

'Et in Arcadia ego!

'He was dead, and I am a dying; and what is worse, I am a suffering. But my torments are allayed by your Arcadian musick.

[1] *Brit. Mus. Add. MSS.* 30991, f. 17. June 30, 1760.

'Tale tuum carmen nobis, divine poeta,
Quale sopor fessis in gramine; quale per aestum
Dulcis aquae saliente sitim restinguere vivo.

'My stormy life at last sinks to a calm. Come death when it will, I'll meet it smiling.

'Dear Sir, enjoy the happiness you deserve.' [1]

In this correspondence with Keate one sees the last flickers of Voltaire's life gradually dying out. 'Be kind to y^r^ old friend Voltaire,' he said in a letter to Keate in 1768. On the back of a playing card, he writes: 'Come english gentlemen, come tho j am damnably sick.' And on the back of another: 'More sick than ever, more unable to go abroad, to enjoy pleasure, damn'd to sufferings and solitude, j present my respect to M^r^ Keate, and to his friends.' [2] The last brief letter, in mixed French and English, and with some now unintelligible allusion, is this:—

'I am dying my good S^r^. if j could form a wisch before j go to the land from wence no travereler returns, it would be to see you, rather than to see that astonishing Lady.

'however if j am alive when she will be in the city of tonnerre, she will hear of me.

'Pardon, mon cher ami, je n'ai plus la force d'écrire, et de vous dire combien je vous aime et vous estime.' [3]

[1] *Works*, xlviii. p. 445. Aug. 27, 1773.
[2] *Brit. Mus. Add. MSS.* 30991, f. 46. Undated.
[3] *Id.* f. 45. Ferney, Sept. 6, 1777.

There are one or two other very slight traces of Voltaire's correspondence with Englishmen. John Baskerville, the printer and type-founder, seems to have written to Voltaire in 1771, asking for one of his works, perhaps proposing to print it from his own types. Voltaire sent what was asked for, and wrote in English to Baskerville, thanking him 'earnestly.' In a second letter to Baskerville, Voltaire wrote: 'The old scribbler, to whom you have been so kind as to send your magnificent editions of Virgil and Milton, thanks you heartily.' [1] And it is from a brief note to an Englishman, a note almost as late as the last sentences to Keate, that we get one of the very latest glimpses of Voltaire at Ferney. One George Hardinge, a judge, and a correspondent of Horace Walpole's, was at Geneva in 1777, and would have liked to see Voltaire. He could not see him; but Voltaire wrote to him 'on a torn and dirty inch of paper':—

'82 *annis et* 82 *morbis oppressus, veniam peto si non sim visendus, sed obliviscendus.*' [2]

But Voltaire's later relations with Englishmen were by no means confined to correspondence. He was always glad to show hospitality to Englishmen in his house in Switzerland. Ferney became a shrine which was visited by inquiring spirits from all coun-

[1] *Works*, xlvii. pp. 502 and 544.

[2] Nichol's *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, iii. 196.

tries, and English pilgrims were far from being the fewest. At times they came upon Voltaire in rather overpowering numbers; but he was a courteous host. He wrote once in 1765: 'In my dirty study, about two o'clock in the afternoon, I was told that there were a dozen English ladies and gentlemen in my tiny drawing-room, and that they had come to dine. I received them in the English fashion, with very little ceremony; the talk was vague, and we had a few disputes about Shakespeare.' [1] A perhaps somewhat apocryphal anecdote tells how an English visitor appeared one day at Ferney, and asserted that as the sole object of his travels had been to see Voltaire he would not go away till his desire was satisfied. 'Oh!' said Voltaire, 'he takes me for some strange animal; very well, he shall pay six pounds or he shall not see me.' The Englishman was quite equal to the occasion. 'Here are twelve pounds,' he coolly said, '*and I will come again to-morrow.*' [2] The average English tourist, forcing himself and his ill-bred curiosity upon the privacy of distinguished men, is not the cause of pleasant reflections to his own countrymen; and Voltaire doubtless felt at times that their inquisitive attentions were rather overdone. 'For fourteen years,' he once wrote, 'I have been the inn-keeper of Europe, and I am tired of the trade. I have received in my

[1] *Works*, xliii. 264. Ferney, July 3, 1765.

[2] *La Vie Intime de Voltaire aux Délices et à Ferney*, par L. Peray et G. Maugras, p. 380.

house three or four hundred Englishmen, and they are all so much in love with their own country that hardly one of them has remembered me after taking his leave of me.'[1] It is to be hoped that it was not an English visitor who indiscreetly let it be known that he would like to remain at Ferney for six weeks. 'You are not,' said Voltaire, 'an imitator of Don Quixote; he took all the inns for castles, but you take castles for inns.' The Englishman, picturing to himself a celebrated writer as the prey of the tourist and wandering hero-hunter, thinks of Abbotsford and Sir Walter Scott; but Abbotsford was a desert compared with the far more modest home at Ferney. Visitors flocked to the place by the carriage-load, often not dreaming that Voltaire would give them a personal reception, but contented merely to see him pass through his garden or leave his house for his accustomed walk. A letter from some unnamed French visitors in 1777 gives an idea of the kind of scene to which constant repetition accustomed Voltaire:—

'We went to see the philosopher of Ferney. Madame Denis, his niece, received us very kindly, but could not promise to secure us a conversation with her uncle. She consented, however, to inform him that some English "milords" wished to salute him. He commonly excuses himself on the ground of his health, and in order to satisfy our curiosity we

[1] *Works*, xlv. 564.

have been obliged to the etiquette which has for some time been established. His self-love is much flattered by the eagerness of the public to see him, but he does not care to lose his time in idle visits and tiresome talk. At a fixed hour he leaves his study and passes through his drawing-room on his way to his walk. That is the moment when the visitor stands to see him for an instant as he passes, as if he were a king. Many carriage-loads arrived after ourselves, and a row was formed through which he passed. We admired his erect and healthy appearance. His coat, waistcoat, and trousers were of *ciselé* velvet, and his stockings were white. As he knew before that the "milords" wished to see him, he imagined that the whole company was English, and he exclaimed in that language: *You see a poor man*! Then speaking into the ear of a little child he said to it: Some day you will be a Marlborough; as for me, I am only a dog of a Frenchman.'[1]

But though Voltaire was thus obliged to take his precautions against unreasonable and burdensome intrusions, he had always a friendly welcome for any Englishman who had the slightest claim on his goodwill. During his stay in England he had himself received kindness from Henry Fox; and when young Charles James Fox was amusing himself with Continental wanderings he repeatedly enjoyed the hospitality of Voltaire. He was a visitor at Ferney while he was still an Eton school-boy. In October 1764

[1] *Works*, i. 410.

Voltaire wrote: 'Mr. Fox's son has made us a long visit. He was travelling on his word of honour and was spending a thousand guineas a month.'[1] Fox was then a boy of fifteen. In the autumn of 1766, Fox, after two years at Oxford, went abroad again, and in August 1768 he found his way a second time to Ferney. His Eton friend and young fellow-traveller, Uvedale Price, accompanied him on this visit, and, sixty years later, wrote this brief account of it:—

'From Geneva, Fox and I went to Voltaire at Ferney, having obtained a permission then seldom granted. It is an event in one's life to have seen and heard that extraordinary man: he was old and infirm, and, in answer to Fox's note and request, said that the name of Fox was sufficient, and that he could not refuse seeing us, *mais que nous venions pour l'exterrer*. He conversed in a lively manner, walking with us to and fro in a sort of alley; and at parting gave us a list of some of his works, adding, *Ce sont des livres de quoi il faut se munir*, they were such as would fortify our young minds against religious prejudices.'[2]

Voltaire, who in 1768 was seventy-four years old, did not on this occasion ask his guests to dine with him, but dismissed them with a light refreshment of chocolate. Of another visit which young Fox paid him, Voltaire himself wrote an account to Henry Fox:—

[1] *Works*, xliii. 342.

[2] Princess Liechtenstein's *Holland House*, i. 84.

'S^r^,—y^r^ son is an english lad, and j an old frenchman. he is healthy, and j sick, yet j love him with all my heart, not only for his father, but for him self. We are very free together, he does me the honour to come to my little caban when he pleases; We are to dine just now, and to drink your health. t'is for me a good fortune to receive the son of the amiable and honour'd m^r^ Fox who was formerly so kind to me; if j were but sixty years old, i would come again to England, but j will live here and dye with the utmost respect

'Monsieur
'Votre tres humble et tres obeissant
'Serviteur Voltaire.'[1]

An English visitor at Ferney, when Voltaire was an old man of eighty-four, was William Beckford, author of the once celebrated romance of *Vathek*. It seems to bring the ages strangely close to one another to reflect that Beckford, who died so recently as 1844, had been received on friendly terms by a man who had been a prisoner in the Bastille about a hundred and thirty years before Beckford's death. Beckford spent a year and a half at Geneva between his eighteenth and twentieth years, and in 1778 he and his tutor found themselves at Voltaire's. Madame Denis received them, and they saw in Voltaire 'a very dark-complexioned, shrivelled, thin old man, stooping much from age, being eighty-four, though not naturally a very tall man.' Voltaire,

[1] Princess Liechtenstein's *Holland House*, ii. 122. Undated.

who introduced himself by saying: 'You see, gentlemen, *un pauvre octogénaire*, about to quit this world,' questioned the two friends about England, and spoke of young Beckford's father in a very complimentary way. When the interview was closing, Voltaire made a little address in the parliamentary style: 'My lords and gentlemen, many thanks for your visit. Pray take some refreshment, and then, if it will amuse you, look into my garden and my situation, and give me leave to retire.' Then Voltaire vanished, 'not apparently ill pleased at the visit.'[1]

The ludicrous and invaluable Boswell was one of Voltaire's visitors, and he has preserved some slight fragments of Voltaire's talk. Speaking of the poetry of Dryden and Pope, Voltaire said: 'Pope drives a handsome chariot, with a couple of neat, trim nags; Dryden, a coach and six stately horses.' When Boswell had duly reported this criticism to Johnson, Johnson replied: 'Why, Sir, the truth is, they both drive coaches and six; but Dryden's horses are either galloping or stumbling: Pope's go at a steady even trot.'[2] If conversation ever flagged in any company of which Boswell made one, he had an unrivalled talent for suddenly producing the most unexpected and ridiculous questions. In a silent society he would abruptly demand of his neighbour: 'What, Sir, would you do if you were shut up alone in a

[1] *Memoirs of William Beckford*, i. 142.

[2] Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (Ed. George Birkbeck Hill), ii. 5.

tower with a new-born baby?' He plagued Voltaire with one of his endless and senseless questionings. Their conversation had turned on Memory:—

'I asked him if he could give me any notion of the situation of our ideas which we have totally forgotten at the time, yet shall afterwards recollect. He paused, meditated a little, and acknowledged his ignorance in the spirit of a philosophical poet, by repeating as a very happy allusion a passage in Thomson's *Seasons*: 'Aye,' said he, 'where sleep the winds when it is calm?'[1]

Boswell at Ferney of course took occasion to turn the talk on Johnson. Speaking in 1763 of the prose writings of Frederick the Great, Johnson had said: 'He writes just as you might suppose Voltaire's footboy to do, who has been his amanuensis. He has such parts as the valet might have, and about as much of the colouring of the style as might be got by transcribing his works.' 'When I was at Ferney,' wrote Boswell, 'I repeated this to Voltaire, in order to reconcile him somewhat to Johnson, whom he, in affecting the English mode of expression, had previously characterised as "a superstitious dog;" but after hearing such a criticism on Frederick the Great,

[1] *The London Magazine*, April 1783; p. 157. Between 1777 and 1783, Boswell wrote in this Magazine a series of seventy Essays under the title of *The Hypochondriack*. Voltaire's allusion is to two lines in Thomson's *Winter*. Addressing the winds, Thomson says:—

'In what far distant regions of the sky,
Hush'd in deep silence, sleep ye when 'tis calm?'

with whom he was then on bad terms, he exclaimed, "An honest fellow." '[1] There is no correspondingly complimentary phrase by Johnson on Voltaire. Perhaps the most flattering thing Johnson ever said of Voltaire was a cold remark made during his visit to Paris. He observed, in Latin—for Johnson spoke no French—*Vir est acerrimi ingenii et paucarum literarum.* In the Preface to his edition of Shakespeare, Johnson spoke very slightingly of Voltaire, bracketing his criticisms with those of Denis and Rymer as 'the petty cavils of petty minds.' Voltaire retorted in the *Dictionnaire Philosophique.*

Before leaving Ferney, Boswell received from Voltaire a snub which was quite Johnsonian in its cutting sarcasm. Boswell mentioned that Johnson and himself intended to pay a visit to the Hebrides. Voltaire's look revealed the surprise which he felt at the idea of such outlandish wanderings, and he said to Boswell: 'You do not insist on my accompanying you?' When Boswell had replied, 'No, Sir,' Voltaire at once added: 'Then I am very willing you should go.'[2]

When and where did Voltaire and Goldsmith meet? Goldsmith's own account is unfortunately very vague. He says that he saw Voltaire at Paris, but this seems impossible; for Voltaire left Paris in 1750, and never saw it again till he returned there to

[1] G. B. Hill's *Boswell*, i. 435.

[2] *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*; G. B. Hill's *Boswell*, v. 14.

triumph and to die in 1778; while Goldsmith was not born till 1728 and did not visit Paris for the first time till 1755. But Goldsmith, a young man of twenty-seven, was wandering, in his slenderly provided way, in Voltaire's Swiss neighbourhood in that same year 1755; and when, in later years, Goldsmith, writing anonymously a hack biography of Voltaire for the London booksellers, confuses place and persons, and says that it was at Paris that he passed an evening in Voltaire's society, he probably merely reports as happening at Paris what really took place at Ferney. Goldsmith's account can hardly be a deliberate invention. In a letter to the *Public Ledger* he speaks of a visit which he made to Voltaire's house at Monrion.[1] No doubt it was of this interview, or of some other about the same time, that Goldsmith, in his fragment called *Memoirs of M. de Voltaire*, gives the following account:—

'As a companion no man ever exceeded him [Voltaire] when he pleased to lead the conversation, which, however, was not always the case. In company which he either disliked or despised, few could be more reserved than he; but when he was warmed in discourse, and had got over a hesitating manner which sometimes he was subject to, it was rapture to hear him. His meagre visage seemed insensibly to gather beauty; every muscle in it had meaning, and his eye beamed with unusual brightness. The person

[1] Goldsmith's *Works* (Ed. Peter Cunningham), iii. 332.

who writes this Memoir, who had the honour and the pleasure of being his acquaintance, remembers to have seen him in a select company of wits of both sexes at Paris, when the subject happened to turn upon English taste and learning. Fontenelle, who was of the party [but in 1755 Fontenelle was ninety-eight years old], and who, being unacquainted with the language or authors of the country he undertook to condemn, with a spirit truly vulgar began to revile both. [*Grammar very vague.*] Diderot, who liked the English, and knew something of their literary pretensions, attempted to vindicate their poetry and learning, but with unequal abilities. The company quickly perceived that Fontenelle was superior in the dispute, and were surprised at the silence which Voltaire had preserved all the former part of the night, particularly as the conversation happened to turn upon one of his favourite topics. Fontenelle continued his triumph till about twelve o'clock, when Voltaire appeared at last roused from his reverie. His whole frame seemed animated. He began his defence with the utmost elegance mixed with spirit, and now and then let fall the finest strokes of raillery upon his antagonist; and his harangue lasted till three in the morning. I must confess that, whether from national partiality, or from the elegant sensibility of his manner, I never was so much charmed, nor did I ever remember so absolute a victory as he gained in this dispute.'[1]

[1] Goldsmith's *Works*, iv. 18. See also Letter XLII. of the *Citizen of the World*. Talleyrand's famous saying that the real use of language is to conceal one's thoughts was, like so many other famous sayings of famous men, by no means his own. No doubt he

An anecdote from the Lives of the Painters connects the name of Goldsmith with Voltaire's. In 1773 Sir Joshua Reynolds painted the portrait of Dr. Beattie in all the glory of his robes as an Oxford Doctor of Civil Law. Under Beattie's arm appeared his volume on the *Immutability of Truth*. As the picture is an allegorical one, the Angel of Truth is good enough to appear in front of the learned Doctor and to do great mischief on a group of figures among which Envy, Falsehood, and other unpleasant abstractions are painfully prominent. The principal head in this unhappy company is, says the biographer of Reynolds, an exact likeness of Voltaire. When Goldsmith saw this picture at Reynolds' house he blazed out into anger. 'It very ill becomes a man of your eminence and character, Sir Joshua, to condescend to be a mean flatterer, or to wish to degrade so high a genius as Voltaire before so mean a writer as Dr. Beattie; for Dr. Beattie and his book together will, in the space of ten years, not be known ever to have been in existence, but your allegorical picture and the fame of Voltaire will live for ever to your disgrace as

took it from Voltaire's dialogue, *Le Chapon et La Poularde*, where the Capon, complaining of men's deceitfulness, says: 'Ils n'emploient les paroles que pour déguiser leurs pensées.' But did not Voltaire himself take this from Goldsmith? In the *Bee* (Oct. 20, 1759) Goldsmith says that, in the judgment of men who know the world, 'the true use of speech is not so much to express our wants as to conceal them.' Young also had written:—

> 'When Nature's end of language is declined,
> And men talk only to conceal their mind.'

a flatterer.'[1] Sir William Forbes says that Reynolds had no intention to represent Voltaire, but Reynolds himself admits it.[2]

Another young Englishman, destined, like Goldsmith, to make his mark on English literature, had superficial acquaintance with Voltaire at Ferney. In 1753 Gibbon, a boy of fifteen, had adopted the Roman Catholic form of faith, and had been immediately despatched by his father to Calvinist care in Switzerland. At Lausanne Gibbon spent the five years from 1753 to 1758, and there he saw Voltaire:—

'Before I was re-called from Switzerland, I had the satisfaction of seeing the most extraordinary man of the age; a poet, an historian, a philosopher, who had filled thirty quartos of prose and verse with his various productions, often excellent, and always entertaining. Need I add the name of Voltaire? After forfeiting, by his own misconduct, the friendship of the first of Kings, he retired, at the age of sixty, with a plentiful fortune, to a free and beautiful country, and resided two winters (1757 and 1758) in the town or neighbourhood of Lausanne. My desire of beholding Voltaire, whom I then rated above his real magnitude, was easily gratified. He received me with civility as an English youth, but I cannot boast of any particular notice or distinction: *Virgilium vidi tantum.*'

Voltaire had gathered together a company of ladies and gentlemen of dramatic tastes, and had

[1] James Northcote's *Life of Sir J. Reynolds*, i. 300. Ed. 1818.
[2] Forbes' *Life of Beattie*, i. 356, *n.*; ii. 42. (Ed. 1807.)

established a theatre in a country-house in the suburbs of Lausanne. Gibbon took much delight in these performances:—

'The highest gratification which I derived from Voltaire's residence at Lausanne, was the uncommon circumstance of hearing a great poet declaim his own productions on the stage. . . . His declamation was fashioned to the pomp and cadence of the old stage; and he expressed the enthusiasm of poetry, rather than the feelings of nature. My ardour, which soon became conspicuous, seldom failed of procuring me a ticket.'

In 1765 Wilkes was among the English visitors at Ferney. In the preceding year he had presented some of his Works to Voltaire with the following note:—

'Mr. Wilkes presents his very respectfull compliments to Mr. de Voltaire. He submits with much deference the inclos'd pieces to a gentleman, who has distinguish'd himself no less as the warm friend of humanity than as the first genius of the age.' [1]

It was seemingly in reply to this note that Voltaire wrote to Wilkes:—

'S^r,—j return you many thanks. You set me in flames with your courage, and you charm me with your wit.

'Y^r most h ob. S,

'V.' [2]

[1] *Brit. Mus. Add. MSS.* 30877, f. 33 v°. Nov. 23, 1764.
[2] *Id.* f. 34.

Wilkes himself wrote from Geneva an account of his visit to Ferney :—

'I have been with Voltaire at Ferney, and was charmed with the reception he gave me, and still more with the fine sense and exquisite wit of his conversation. I think him the most universal genius, the most amiable as well as the wittiest of our species. He is a divine old man, born for the advancement of true philosophy and the polite arts, and to free mankind from the gloomy terrors of superstition,

> Atque metus omnes, et inexorabile fatum
> Subjecit pedibus, strepitumque Acherontis avari.

He has done more to persuade the practice of a general toleration, of humanity and benevolence, than the greatest philosophers of antiquity. His conduct in the affair of the family of Calas is more meritorious than the whole lives of most saints. He is exactly well-bred, and in conversation possesses a fund of gaiety and humour which would be admired in a young man, and he joins to it those immense stores of literature only to be acquired by age. His memory is very wonderful, and the anecdotes it furnishes are so various and interesting that he is the only exception I know of a man above seventy not being sunk into his anecdotage. He lives in the noblest, gayest style of a French nobleman, receiving all strangers, giving plays in his own theatre, and you have the entire command of his house, equipages, horses, etc. He is adored by all the inhabitants and vassals of his extensive domains, and with reason, for he hath been the creator of everything useful, beautiful, or valuable in the whole tract near him, which before was a rude

wilderness. When he came *the desert smiled, and Paradise was opened in the wild.* He has built little towns and villages, established several manufactures, and peopled the country with a happy race of mortals, who are daily blessing their benefactor. I told him, *These are thy glorious works, parent of good,* and he is really more pleased in talking of them than of his most applauded literary works.'[1]

Dr. Charles Burney, author of the *History of Music,* and father of the authoress of *Evelina* and *Cecilia,* has left an account of a visit which he paid to Voltaire and Ferney in 1770. Burney was travelling in France and Italy, collecting materials for his musical work; and when he found himself at Lyons, he thought of Geneva and Voltaire. He went to Geneva, and his first thought was to visit Voltaire in company with some other strangers who were about to make the pilgrimage to Ferney:—

'But, to say the truth . . . I did not much like going with these people who had only a bookseller to introduce them; and I had heard that some English had lately met with a rebuff from M. de Voltaire, by going without any letter of recommendation, or anything to recommend themselves. He asked them what they wanted. Upon their replying they wished only to see so extraordinary a man, he said: *Well, gentlemen, you now see me—did you take me for a wild beast or monster, that was fit only to be stared at as a*

[1] R. A. Davenport's *New Elegant Extracts* Part X. p. 350. (Chiswick, 1827.)

show? This story very much frighted me; for not having any intention of going to Geneva, when I left London, or even Paris, I was quite unprovided with a recommendation: however I was determined to see the place of his residence, which I took to be

Cette maison d'Aristippe, ces jardins d'Epicure,

to which he retired in 1755, but was mistaken. I drove to it alone. . . . His house is three or four miles from Geneva, but near the lake. I approached it with reverence, and a curiosity of the most minute kind. I enquired *when* I first trod on his domain; I had an intelligent and talkative postillion, who answered all my questions very satisfactorily. His estate is very large here, and he is building pretty farm-houses upon it. He has erected on the Geneva side a quadrangular *justice* or gallows, to show that he is the *seigneur*. One of his farms, or rather manufacturing houses, for he is establishing a manufacture upon his estate, was so handsome that I thought it was his *château*. We drove to Ferney, through a charming country, covered with corn and vines, in view of the lake and mountains of Gex, Swisserland, and Savoy. On the left hand, approaching the house, is a neat chapel with this inscription: DEO EREXIT VOLTAIRE. MDCCLVI.

'I sent to enquire whether a stranger might be allowed to see the house and gardens, and was answered in the affirmative. A servant soon came, and conducted me into the cabinet or closet where his master had just been writing, which is never shown when he is at home; but having walked out, I was allowed that privilege. From thence I passed to the

library, which is not a very large one, but well filled. Here I found a whole-length figure in marble of himself, recumbent, in one of the windows; and many curiosities in another room; a bust of himself, made not two years since; his mother's picture; that of his niece, Madame Denis; his brother, M. Dupuis; the Calas family, and others. It is a very neat and elegant house, not large, nor affectedly decorated.

'I should first have remarked that close to the chapel, between that and the house, is the theatre which he built some years ago; where he treated his friends with some of his own tragedies,—it is now only used as a receptacle for wood and lumber, there having been no play acted in it these four years. The servant told me his master was seventy-eight, but very well. *Il travaille*, said he, *pendant dix heures chaque jour*. He studies ten hours every day; writes constantly without spectacles, and walks out with only a domestic, often a mile or two—*Et là voilà, là bas!*—and see yonder where he is.

'He was going to his workmen. My heart leaped at the sight of so extraordinary a man. He had just then quitted his garden, and was crossing the court before his house. Seeing my chaise, and me on the point of mounting it, he made a sign to his servant, who had been my *Cicerone*, to go to him, in order, I suppose, to inquire who I was. After they had exchanged a few words together, he approached the place where I stood, motionless, in order to contemplate his person as much as I could when his eyes were turned from me; but on seeing him move towards me, I found myself drawn by some irresistible

power towards him; and, without knowing what I did, I insensibly met him half-way.

'It is not easy to conceive it possible for life to subsist in a form so nearly composed of mere skin and bone as that of M. de Voltaire. He complained of decrepitude, and said, he supposed I was curious to form an idea of the figure of one walking after death. However, his eyes and whole countenance are still full of fire; and though so emaciated, a more lively expression cannot be imagined.

'He enquired after English news, and observed that poetical squabbles had given way to political ones; but seemed to think the spirit of opposition as necessary in poetry as in politics. *Les querelles d'auteurs sont pour le bien de la littérature, comme dans un gouvernement libre les querelles des grands et les clameurs des petits sont nécessaires à la liberté.* And added, *When critics are silent, it does not so much prove the age to be correct, as dull.* He enquired what poets we had now; I told him that we had Mason and Gray. *They write but little,* said he, *and you seem to have no one who lords it over the rest like Dryden, Pope, and Swift.* I told him that it was one of the inconveniences of periodical journals, however well executed, that they often silenced modest men of genius, while impudent blockheads were impenetrable, and unable to feel the critic's scourge: that Mr. Gray and Mr. Mason had both been illiberally treated by mechanical critics, even in newspapers; and added, that modesty and love of quiet seemed in these gentlemen to have got the better even of their love of fame.

'During this conversation, we approached the

buildings that he was constructing near the road to his *château*. *These*, said he, pointing to them, *are the most innocent, and, perhaps, the most useful of all my works*. I observed that he had other works, which were of far more extensive use, and would be much more durable than those. He was so obliging as to show me several farm-houses that he had built, and the plans of others; after which I took my leave, for fear of breaking in upon his time.'[1]

In 1765 another English visitor, a Major W. Broome, appeared at Ferney, and has left a brief report behind him. This Major Broome was for a very long time the intimate friend of Sir Henry Grattan, Speaker of the Irish House of Commons, and died in 1826, at the age of eighty-nine. He noted in his Journal:—

'March 16, 1765 (Geneva)—Dined with Mons. Voltaire, who behaved very politely. He is very old, was dressed in a robe-de-chambre of blue sattan and gold spots in it, with a sort of sattan cap and blue tassle of gold. He spoke all the time English. . . . His house is not very fine, but genteel, and stands upon a mount close to the mountains. He is tall and very thin, has a very piercing eye, and a look singularly vivacious. He told me of his acquaintance with Pope, Swift (with whom he lived for three months at Lord Peterborough's), and Gay, who first showed him the *Beggar's Oppora* before it was acted. He says he

[1] Dr. Burney's *Present State of Music in France and Italy*, pp. 55–62. (2nd edition, 1773.)

admires Swift, and loved Gay vastly. He said that Swift had a great deal of the *ridiculum acre*. . . . He told me of his being present at the ceremony of Lord Kinsale's first wearing his hat before the king. . . . At the house of Mons. Voltaire there is a handsome new church, with this inscription on the upper part of the front to the west: DEO EREXIT VOLTAIRE. MDCCLXI.'[1]

Another English visitor to Ferney, one Samuel Sharpe, a surgeon and writer on surgery, gives another glimpse of Voltaire as seen by English eyes in this same year 1765:—

'I must confess to you that I have yet seen nothing which has afforded me so much pleasure as that extraordinary genius Mons. Voltaire. My principal motive for passing the Alps, by the way of Geneva, was a visit to that Gentleman. I knew him in the days of my youth, and had the honour to be sometimes with him when he was in London. I also saw him at Paris in 1749, and now that he is become the topic of conversation in almost every village in Europe, I could not think of going to Italy without granting myself the indulgence of seeing him once more. He lives about four miles from Geneva, in a most splendid and hospitable manner, keeping an open table, to which strangers of every nation find an easy introduction. Contiguous to his house is a small theatre, which holds about fifty people, but, when enlarged, will contain two hundred; the carpenters were beginning the alteration the day I dined with him. Perhaps he never had been more happy in any

[1] Quoted in *Notes and Queries*, Nov. 18, 1854, p. 403.

one period of his life than at the juncture I saw him. Mademoiselle Clairon, who has quitted the stage, was on a visit there, and had exhibited that week in two characters of his own writing. I unfortunately arrived at Geneva the night after she had performed for the last time. I had often seen her in 1749; but I found by Voltaire that, excellent as she was in those days, she had improved in the last sixteen years beyond all imagination. I cannot give you an idea of the ecstacies he was in, acting and representing, every now and then, a hundred passages, where she had been particularly happy in her expression. His eyes have such a brilliancy in those moments, that you forget he is above seventy-two. He had that morning written an Epistle to Mademoiselle Clairon, in verse, which he read to the company from the foul copy: there were some erasements in it, but not many. To perform a play, he is obliged to seize the opportunity, when any strolling comedians come into the neighbourhood of Geneva; with some of these, and a niece who lives with him, he then entertains himself and friends; but the visit of Madame Clairon had given a perfection to this last spectacle which he had never hoped for.

'I wish, for the honour of my country, it were possible that a Frenchman could taste the language of Shakespeare. I am persuaded, could Voltaire feel the energy of our Poet's descriptions, he would talk no more of his barbarisms, and his *some beauties*. He who has so great a share of merit himself, would gladly pay the tribute due to the shrine of Shakespeare, and, possibly, grieve to have attempted those translations

which he has presented to his countrymen as a specimen of Shakespeare's manner of writing. It is true, he apologises for the faintness of the execution; but still, had he felt the excessive inferiority of his imitations, had he known so well as Englishmen do, that they have not the least resemblance of (*sic*) the strength, spirit, and imagination of the original, he certainly would never have hazarded the publication. I remember to have heard him say, about the year 1726, that, before he learnt English, he had read the *Spectators* in French, and often wondered that such dull writings should please a polite nation; "but now," said he, "that I have acquired the tongue, I wipe my —— with Plutarch!" The phrase was too remarkable, and made too strong an impression on the ears of a young man, to be ever forgotten.'[1]

Young English and Scotch tutors, wandering with their pupils on the continent of Europe, seem to have made a point of finding their way to Voltaire. Among these was the afterwards celebrated Sir William Jones, who, as a young man, was a private teacher in the Spencer family. From Paris he wrote, in 1770, to Lady Spencer:—

'I made an excursion to Geneva, in hopes of seeing Voltaire, but was disappointed. I sent him a note with a few verses, implying that the Muse of Tragedy had left her ancient seat in Greece and Italy, and had fixed her abode on the borders of a lake, etc. He returned this answer: "The worst of French poets

[1] Sharpe's *Letters from Italy*, pp. 2–5.

and philosophers is almost dying; age and sickness have brought him to his last day; he can converse with nobody, and entreats Mr. Jones to excuse and pity him. He presents him with his humble respects." But he was not so ill as he imagined; for he had been walking in his court, and went into his house just as I came to it. The servants showed me somebody at a window, who they said was he; but I had scarce a glimpse of him. I am inclined to think that Voltaire begins to be rather serious, when he finds himself upon the brink of eternity; and that he refuses to see company, because he cannot display his former wit and sprightliness.' [1]

In 1774 Adam Ferguson, travelling with a youthful pupil, was at Geneva, and frequently visited Voltaire. Returning to London early in 1775, he wrote to his friend Dr. Alexander Carlyle:—

'My second [letter] was from Ferney, the seat of that renowned and pious apostle, Voltaire, who saluted me with a compliment on a gentleman of my family who had civilised the Russians. [Ferguson's *Institutes of Moral Philosophy* had been translated into Russian.] I owned this relation, and at this and every successive visit encouraged every attempt at conversation—even jokes against Moses, Adam and Eve, and the rest of the Prophets—till I began to be considered as a person who, tho' true to my own faith, had no ill-humour to the freedom of fancy in others. As my own compliment had come all the way from Russia, I wished to know how some of my friends would fare, but I found

[1] Lord Teignmouth's *Memoirs of Sir W. Jones*, i. 176.

the old man in a state of perfect indifference to all authors except two sorts—one, those who write Panegyrics, another, who write Invectives on himself. There is a third kind, whose names he has been used to repeat, fifty or sixty years, without knowing anything of them—such as Locke, Boyle, Newton, etc. I forgot his competitors for fame, of whom he is always either silent, or speaks slightingly. The fact is, that he reads little or none, his mind exists by reminiscence, and by doing over and over what it has been used to do. Dictates tales, dissertations, and tragedies; even the latter with all his elegance tho' not with his former force. His conversation is among the pleasantest I ever met with; he lets you forget the superiority which the public opinion gives him, which is indeed greater than what we can conceive in this Island.'[1]

The novel *Zeluco* is no longer a read book. Its author, John Moore, a doctor and miscellaneous writer, travelled for five years on the Continent with the youthful Duke of Hamilton, returning to England in 1778. In the following year he published a work entitled *A View of Society and Manners in France, Switzerland, and Germany: with Anecdotes relative to some Eminent Characters.* Voltaire was among the Eminent Characters of whom Moore has recorded some of his impressions. Moore wrote from Geneva in 1776:—

[1] *Biographical Sketch of Adam Ferguson.* By John Small (1864.)

'Since I have been in this country, I have had frequent opportunities of conversing with him [Voltaire], and still more with those who have lived in intimacy with him for many years; so that, whatever remarks I may send you on this subject are founded either on my own observation, or on that of the most candid and intelligent of his acquaintance.

'He has enemies and admirers here, as he has everywhere else; and not unfrequently both united in the same person.

'The first idea which has presented itself to all who have attempted a description of his person, is that of a skeleton. In as far as this implies excessive leanness, it is just; but it must be remembered, that this skeleton, this mere composition of skin and bone, has a look of more spirit and vivacity, than is generally produced by flesh and blood, however blooming and youthful.

'The most piercing eyes I ever beheld are those of Voltaire, now in his eightieth [his eighty-second] year. His whole countenance is expressive of genius, observation, and extreme sensibility.

'In the morning he has a look of anxiety and discontent; but this gradually wears off, and after dinner he seems cheerful;—yet an air of irony never entirely forsakes his face, but may always be observed lurking in his features, whether he frowns or smiles.

'When the weather is favourable, he takes an airing in his coach, with his niece, or with some of his guests, of whom there is always a sufficient number at Ferney. Sometimes he saunters in his garden; or, if the weather does not permit him to go

abroad, he employs his leisure hours in playing at chess with Père Adam; or in receiving the visits of strangers, a continual succession of whom attend at Ferney to catch an opportunity of seeing him; or in dictation and reading letters; for he still retains correspondents in all the countries of Europe, who inform him of every remarkable occurrence, and send him every new literary production as soon as it appears.

'By far the greater part of his time is spent in his study; and whether he reads himself, or listens to another, he always has a pen in his hand, to take notes, or make remarks.

'Composition is his principal amusement. No author who writes for daily bread, no young poet ardent for distinction, is more assiduous with his pen, or more anxious for fresh fame, than the wealthy and applauded Seigneur of Ferney.

'He lives in a very hospitable manner, and takes care always to keep a good cook. He has generally two or three visitors from Paris, who stay with him a month or six weeks at a time. When they go, their places are soon supplied; so that there is a constant rotation of society at Ferney. These, with Voltaire's own family, and his visitors from Geneva, compose a family of twelve or fourteen people, who dine daily at his table, whether he appears or not. For when engaged in preparing some new production for the press, indisposed, or in bad spirits, he does not dine with the company; but satisfies himself with seeing them for a few minutes, either before or after dinner.

'All who bring recommendations from his friends,

may depend upon being received, if he be not really indisposed. He often presents himself to the strangers, who assemble almost every afternoon in his anti-chamber (*sic*), although they bring no particular recommendation. But sometimes they are obliged to retire without having their curiosity gratified.

'As often as this happens, he is sure of being accused of peevishness; and a thousand ill-natured stories are related, perhaps invented, out of revenge, because he is not in the humour of being exhibited like a dancing bear on a holiday. It is much less surprising that he sometimes refuses, than that he should comply so often. In him, this complaisance must proceed solely from a desire to oblige; for Voltaire has been so long accustomed to admiration, that the stare of a few strangers cannot be supposed to afford him much pleasure. . . .

'The forenoon is not a proper time to visit Voltaire. He cannot bear to have his hours of study interrupted. This alone is sufficient to put him in bad humour; besides, he is then apt to be querulous, whether he suffers by the infirmities of age or from some accidental cause of chagrin. Whatever is the reason, he is less an optimist at that part of the day than at any other. It was in the morning, probably, that he remarked, *que c'était dommage que le quinquina se trouvait en Amérique, et la fièvre en nos climats.*

'Those who are invited to supper, have an opportunity of seeing him in the most advantageous point of view. He then exerts himself to entertain the company, and seems as fond of saying what are called good things as ever; and when any lively remark or

bon mot comes from another, he is equally delighted, and pays the fullest tribute of applause. The spirit of mirth gains upon him by indulgence. When surrounded by his friends, and animated by the presence of women, he seems to enjoy life with all the sensibility of youth. His genius then surmounts the restraints of age and infirmity, and flows along in a fine strain of pleasing, spirited observation, and delicate irony.

'He has an excellent talent of adapting his conversation to his company. The first time the Duke of Hamilton waited on him he turned the discourse on the ancient alliance between the French and Scotch nations. Reciting the circumstance of one of his Grace's predecessors having accompanied Mary, Queen of Scots, whose heir he at that time was, to the Court of France, he spoke of the heroic character of his ancestors, the ancient Earls of Douglas, of the great literary reputation of some of his countrymen, then living; and mentioned the names of Hume and Robertson in terms of high approbation.

'His dislike to the clergy is well known. This leads him to join in a very trite topic of abuse with people who have no pretension to that degree of wit which could alone make their railings tolerable. The conversation happening to turn into this channel, one person said, If you subtract pride from priests, nothing will remain. *Vous comptez donc, Monsieur, la gourmandise pour rien*, said Voltaire.

'He approves much more of Marmontel's Art of Poetry than of any poems of that author's composition. Speaking of these, he said that Marmontel, like Moses,

could guide others to the Holy Land, though he was not allowed to enter it himself. . . .

'A certain person, who stammered very much, found means to get himself introduced at Ferney. He had no other recommendation than the praises he very liberally bestowed on himself. When he left the room, Voltaire said, he supposed him to be an avanturier, an imposteur. Madame Denis said, Impostors never stammer. To which Voltaire replied: *Moïse ne begayait-il pas ?*

'He compared the British nation to a hogshead of their own strong beer; the top of which is froth, the bottom dregs, the middle excellent.

'A friend of Voltaire's having recommended to his perusal a particular system of metaphysics, supported by a train of reasonings by which the author displayed his own ingenuity and address, without convincing the mind of the reader, or proving anything besides his own eloquence and sophistry, asked, some time after, the critic's opinion of this performance.

'Metaphysical writers, replied Voltaire, are like minuet dancers; who being dressed to the greatest advantage, make a couple of bows, move through the room in the finest attitudes, display all their graces, are in continual motion without advancing a step, and finish at the identical point from which they set out.' [1]

But no English visitor to Ferney has left such an account of his interviews with Voltaire as the now quite forgotten Rev. Martin Sherlock. Between 1776

[1] Moore's *View of Society*, etc. i. 260–271. (London, 1779.

and 1778 Sherlock—who was Chaplain to the Earl of Bristol, Bishop of Derry—travelled in Germany, Italy, and Switzerland, and he recorded his impressions of men and places in letters which were originally published in French. They were then republished in 1780 as *Letters from an English Traveller; translated from the French Original.* It was in April 1776 that Sherlock appeared at Ferney, and he may say a word on externals before he finds himself face to face with Voltaire:—

'His house is convenient, and well furnished; among other pictures is the portrait of the Empress of Russia, and that of the King of Prussia, which was sent him by that monarch, as was also his own bust in Berlin porcelain, with the inscription IMMORTALIS.

'His arms are on his door, and on all his plates, which are of silver: at the desert, the spoons, forks, and blades of the knives, were of silver gilt: there were two courses, and five servants, three of whom were in livery: no strange servant is allowed to enter.

'He spends his time in reading, writing, playing at chess with Father Adam,[1] and in looking at the workmen building in his village. . . .

'In the two days I saw him, he wore white cloth shoes, white woollen stockings, red breeches, with a night-gown [Sherlock means a dressing-gown] and waistcoat of blue linen flowered and lined with yellow:

[1] A Jesuit priest who lived in Voltaire's house. 'Though he is Father Adam, he is not the first of men,' Voltaire used mildly to remark.

he had on a grizzle wig with three ties, and over it a silk night-cap embroidered with gold and silver.'

And now Sherlock gives his account of his two visits to Voltaire :—

'The Marquis d'Argens, of Angoulême, gave me a letter to M. de Voltaire, with whom he is intimately acquainted. Every one recommended by M. d'Argens is sure to be well received at Ferney: M. de Voltaire treated me with great civility; my first visit lasted two hours; and he invited me to dinner the next day. Each day, when I left him, I went to an inn, where I wrote down the most remarkable things that he had said to me; here they are.

'He met me in the hall; his nephew, M. d'Hornois, Counsellor in the Parliament of Paris, held him by the arm; he said to me, with a very weak voice, You see a very old man, who makes a great effort to have the honour of seeing you; will you take a walk in my garden? It will please you, for it is in the English taste; it was I who introduced that taste into France, and it is become universal; but the French parody your gardens, they put thirty acres in three.

'From his gardens you see the Alps, the Lake, the city of Geneva, and its environs, which are very pleasant. He said, It is a beautiful prospect: he pronounced these words tolerably well.

Sherlock. 'How long is it since you were in England?

Voltaire. 'Fifty years at least [It was really only forty-seven since Voltaire left England in 1729].

His Nephew. 'It was at the time when you printed the first edition of your *Henriade*.

'We then talked of literature; and from that moment he forgot his age and infirmities, and spoke with the warmth of a man of thirty. He said some shocking things against Moses and against Shakespeare.

Voltaire. 'Shakespeare is detestably translated by M. de la Place. He has substituted de la Place to (*sic*) Shakespeare. I have translated the first three acts of *Julius Caesar* with exactness: a translator should lose his own genius, and assume that of his author. If the author be a buffoon, the translator should be so too: Shakespeare always had a buffoon; it was the taste of the age, which he took from the Spaniards: the Spaniards had always a buffoon; sometimes it was a god, sometimes a devil; sometimes he prayed, at other times he fought.

'We talked of Spain.

Voltaire. 'It is a country of which we know no more than of the most savage parts of Africa, and it is not worth the trouble of being known. If a man would travel there, he must carry his bed, etc. When he comes into a town, he must go into one street to buy a bottle of wine, a piece of a mule in another, he finds a table in a third, and he sups. A French nobleman was passing through Pampeluna: he sent out for a spit; there was only one in the town, and that was borrowed for a wedding.

His Nephew. 'That is a village which M. de Voltaire has built.

Voltaire. 'Yes; we are free here; cut off a little

corner, and we are out of France. I asked some privileges for my children here, and the king has granted me all that I asked, and has declared the country of Gex free from all the taxes of the farmers-general; so that salt, which formerly sold for ten sous a pound, now sells for four. I have nothing more to ask—except to live.

'We went into the library.

Voltaire. 'There are several of your countrymen (he had Shakespeare, Milton, Congreve, Rochester, Shaftesbury, Bolingbroke, Robertson, Hume, etc.). Robertson is your Livy; his Charles V. is written with truth. Hume wrote his History to be applauded, Rapin to instruct; and both obtained their ends.

Sherlock. 'You knew Lord Chesterfield?

Voltaire. 'Yes, I knew him; he had a great deal of wit.

Sherlock. 'You know Lord Hervey [Earl of Bristol].

Voltaire. 'I have the honour to correspond with him.

Sherlock. 'He has talents.

Voltaire. 'As much wit as Lord Chesterfield, and more solidity.

Sherlock. 'Lord Bolingbroke and you agreed that we have not one good tragedy.

Voltaire. 'True; *Cato* is incomparably well written; Addison had much taste, but the abyss between taste and genius is immense. Shakespeare had an amazing genius, but no taste; he has spoiled the taste of the nation; he has been their taste for two hundred years; and what is the taste of a nation for two hundred years, will be so for two thousand: this taste becomes

a religion; and there is in your country a great many fanatics in regard to Shakespeare.

Sherlock. 'Were you personally acquainted with Lord Bolingbroke?

Voltaire. 'Yes; his face was imposing, and so was his voice; in his works there are many leaves, and little fruit; distorted expressions, and periods intolerably long.

'There, said he, you see the Alcoran, which is well read at least (it was marked throughout with bits of paper); there are *Historic Doubts* by Horace Walpole (which had also several marks); here is the portrait of Richard III.; you see, he was a handsome youth.

Sherlock. 'You have built a church?

Voltaire. 'True; and it is the only one in the universe in honour of God; you have churches built to St. Paul, to St. Genevieve, but not one to God.

'This is what he said to me the first day. You did not expect any connection in this dialogue, because I only put down the most striking things that he said. I have perhaps mangled some of his phrases; but, as well as I can recollect, I have given his own words.'

On the following day Sherlock dined at Ferney:—

'The next day, as we sat down to dinner, he said [in English], We are here for *liberty and property*. This gentleman [Father Adam] is a Jesuit, he wears his hat: I am a poor invalid, I wear my night-cap.

'I do not immediately recollect why he quoted these verses:—

> Here lies the mutton-eating King,
> Whose promise none relies on,
> Who never said a foolish thing,
> Nor ever did a wise one.

But, speaking of Racine, he quoted these two:—

> The weighty bullion of one sterling line,
> Drawn to French wire would through whole pages shine.

Sherlock. 'The English prefer Corneille to Racine.

Voltaire. 'That is because the English are not sufficiently acquainted with the French tongue to feel the beauties of Racine's style, or the harmony of his versification: Corneille ought to please them more, because he is more striking; but Racine pleases the French, because he has more softness and tenderness.

Sherlock. 'How did you find the English fare? [Voltaire pretended to think that Sherlock's *la chère Anglaise* meant *the dear Englishwoman*, and he replied]:

Voltaire. 'Very fresh and very white.

'It should be remembered, that when he made this pun upon women, he was in his eighty-third year.

Sherlock. 'Their language?

Voltaire. 'Energetic, precise, and barbarous; they are the only nation that pronounce their *a*, *e*.

'He related an anecdote of Swift: Lady Carteret, wife of the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland in Swift's time, said to him, The air of this country is good. Swift fell down on his knees, For God's sake, madam, don't say so in England; they will certainly tax it.

'He afterwards said that though he could not perfectly pronounce English, his ear was sensible of the harmony of their language and of their versification; that Pope and Dryden had the most harmony in poetry, Addison in prose.

Voltaire. 'How have you found the French?

Sherlock. 'Amiable and witty: I have only one

fault to find with them; they imitate the English too much.

Voltaire. 'How! do you think us worthy to be originals ourselves?

Sherlock. 'Yes, sir.

Voltaire. 'So do I too; but it is of your government that we are jealous.

Sherlock. 'I have found the French more free than I expected.

Voltaire. 'Yes, as to walking, or eating whatever he pleases, or lolling in his elbow-chair, a Frenchman is free enough; but as to taxes—Ah! Sir, you are happy, you may do anything; we are born in slavery, and we die in slavery; we cannot even die as we will, we must have a priest.

'Speaking of our government, he said: The English sell themselves, which is a proof that they are worth something: we French do not sell ourselves, probably because we are worth nothing.

Sherlock. 'What is your opinion of the *Eloïse*?

Voltaire. 'It will not be read twenty years hence.

Sherlock. 'Mademoiselle de l'Enclos has written good letters.

Voltaire. 'She never wrote one; they were by the wretched Crébillon.

'The Italians, he said, were a nation of brokers; that Italy was an old wardrobe, in which there were many old clothes of exquisite taste. We are still, said he, to know whether the subjects of the Pope or of the Grand Turk are the most abject.

'He talked of England and of Shakespeare; and explained to Madame Denis part of a scene in Henry V.,

where the King makes love to Queen Catherine in bad French, and of another in which that Queen takes a lesson in English from her waiting-woman, and where there are several very gross *double-entendres*, particularly on the word *foot*; and then addressing himself to me, "But see," said he, "what it is to be an author; he will do anything to get money."

Voltaire. 'When I see an Englishman subtle and fond of law-suits, I say, There is a Norman, who came in with William the Conqueror. When I see a man good-natured and polite, That is one who came with the Plantagenets. A brutal character, That is a Dane; for your nation, as well as your language, is a medley of many others.

'After dinner, passing through a little parlour, where there was a head of Locke, another of the Countess of Coventry, and several more, he took me by the arm, and stopped me—Do you know this bust [Newton's]? It is the greatest genius that ever existed: if all the geniuses of the universe assembled, he should lead the band.

'It was of Newton, and of his own works, that he always spoke with the greatest warmth.'[1]

And so Sherlock left Voltaire extolling Newton and saying shocking things of Moses and Shakespeare.

[1] Martin Sherlock's *Letters from an English Traveller*, i. 98–108. (Ed. 1802.)

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

THE influence of England on Voltaire was far greater than Voltaire's influence on England. It is indeed one of the commonplaces of criticism—a criticism which only repeats Voltaire's own admission—to say that Voltaire's visit to England was the turning-point of his life. His own writings are the best proof of this. And so this is the one aspect of his English visit which has received adequate attention from the more distinguished of his modern critics. In a short monograph which is biographical and not critical, it is superfluous to repeat what has already been said on this subject. Condorcet sums it up neatly enough when he says that Voltaire left France merely a poet, and returned from England a philosopher. Voltaire was only thirty-two when he arrived in London. His life had been little more than that of the man of pleasure, varied by occasional caresses and occasional rebuffs in the field of *belles-lettres*. He was a young man of fashion, fond of brilliant society, ready to take all the pleasures that came in his way, but with a special spice of piquancy in his tongue—a talent

for saying cutting things which had already made official persons wince. Yet, in the midst of all his gay carelessness, signs had not been wanting that there was a more serious side to Voltaire. He had been forced to think about the Church as he saw it in Paris, and he had already found that it was an institution to which he could pay very little respect. How could Voltaire do otherwise? On his one hand was his brother, a man of the bitterest and narrowest ecclesiastical views; on the other hand were the Parisian abbés, whose pagan lives were nothing but scenes of good-natured dissoluteness. It would be uncritical to lay too much stress on various outspoken passages in Voltaire's earliest writings. Every one who has his word to say on this matter puts his finger on two lines in Voltaire's earliest play :—

> Nos prêtres ne sont point ce qu'un vain peuple pense;
> Notre crédulité fait toute leur science.

Allowance must be made for works which are dramatic, and in phrases of this sort Voltaire was simply re-echoing the voices of the society in which he lived. But there is hardly any allowance to be made for the *Uranie* poem, written before Voltaire's visit to England, though not published till his return to France. This piece alone would be enough to prove that Voltaire did not need to come to England to learn how to be unorthodox. The gay young man of fashion had already his serious side, if the lighter side was now—as always—by far the more conspicuous.

Voltaire did not need to come to England to lose his religious orthodoxy. He did not need to come here to get his first sight of something like political and constitutional freedom; for he had already seen that on a smaller scale in Holland. He did not even need to come to England to experience England's first influence upon him; he had known Bolingbroke in France. But though all this is true, it remains equally true that Voltaire, without his visit to England, would not have been the Voltaire whom all the world knows.

The effect of England on Voltaire was far more in the general than in the particular. He was filled with admiration for one side of English society; he was simply disgusted with another side; but from all sides he carried away one special impression which remained with him till the day of his death. When Voltaire made his famous last journey to Paris, to die there, 'stifled with roses,' Benjamin Franklin brought his grandson to him, asking that he would give his blessing to the boy. Voltaire, speaking in English, said: 'God and Liberty is the only one fitting for Franklin's children.' It really was this one word 'Liberty' that Voltaire took back with him from England; liberty from political tyranny in public and private life; liberty from priestly pretensions in matters of conscience and religious beliefs. However much Voltaire preferred France to England, he was never weary of dwelling on the one great contrast

between the two countries: the French were slaves, the English were free. Voltaire was especially struck with this English freedom in matters of religion. The France which he had personally known had been the France marked by the persecution and the superstition of the later gloomy days of Louis XIV. It was the France of the Jansenist quarrel—a quarrel in which Voltaire's own brother was a bigoted disputer, though Voltaire himself kept contemptuously aloof from the affair. But here in England Voltaire found an extraordinary number of sects living peaceably side by side. He found that liberty of conscience was allowed to every man, and that religious questions were discussed with perfect freedom from restraint. Voltaire, in the Parisian circles which he frequented, had of course been familiar with freedom from religious and all other restrictions. He had supped and rhymed in the society of abbés who lived dissolute lives, and privately scoffed at the doctrines and beliefs which in public they solemnly professed. But what astonished Voltaire in England was to find himself in a society where the want of orthodoxy was not the mere jaunty hypocrisy of men of fashion; where doubts and disbeliefs were not exclusively whispered in the circles of the polite and the intellectually cultured, but were put within the reach of everyone who could read the plainest of plain language. Voltaire was simply fascinated by the spectacle of such freedom.

Yet Voltaire, as must be the case with almost

every traveller who spends a comparatively short time in a foreign country, knew really only the circles in which he himself moved; and in England, Voltaire lived almost exclusively with the wits and men and women of fashion. He probably took away with him a very erroneous conception of the general state of English thought and belief in matters of religion. It was not in the circles of Pope and Bolingbroke that Voltaire would be likely to discover the religious views of the serious men who were less highly placed in the world. 'However a loose kind of Deism might be the tone of fashionable circles, it is clear that distinct disbelief of Christianity was by no means the general state of the public mind.' [1] Voltaire, says Macaulay in his rather violent way, 'had lived with men of wit and fashion during his visit to England, and knew nothing of the feeling of the grave part of mankind or of the middle classes. He says in one of his ten thousand tracts that no shopkeeper in London believes there is a hell.' Voltaire did not write ten thousand tracts; and Macaulay, though a man of wit, was destitute of humour. But it remains true that, with few exceptions, Voltaire's contact with English society was mainly limited to the cultured and sceptical classes. During his stay in England the Deistical controversy was at its height. Collins, devoting himself to the argument against prophecy, was denying that the prophecies of the Old Testament could be

[1] Mark Pattison: in *Essays and Reviews*.

any proof of the truth of Christianity. Woolston was denying that the miracles recorded in the New Testament were miracles at all. Chubb, Tindal, Morgan, Toland, and many others of whose names it is now a weariness to think, joined in the controversy. And above all, for Voltaire, there was Bolingbroke. Voltaire caught eagerly at what he found in these men, amplified their arguments, and set himself to that downright, uncompromising attack on the orthodox Christianity of his day with which his name is still, more than with anything else, associated. Voltaire's attacks were rather skirmishes than serious battles, and his method and criticisms have long been obsolete; but it was undoubtedly from England that he took his impulse; and while the English Deists were always dull, Voltaire was always witty.

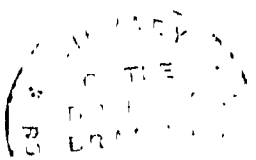
Voltaire found in England the same spirit of liberty reigning in matters of philosophy and speculation. Bruyère had said long before: 'Un homme né chrétien et français est embarrassé pour écrire: les grands sujets lui sont défendus; il les entame quelquefois, et se détourne ensuite sur de petites choses, qu'il relève par la beauté de son génie et de son style.' From restraint of this kind Voltaire found England altogether free. The boldest speculative ideas could be published without danger; yet when Voltaire, on his return to France, ventured to give his fellow-countrymen a mild account of the currents of English thought, his book was burnt by the hang-

man. Speaking of Walpole's motto, *Fari quæ sentiat*, Voltaire says that 'this is the motto of the English philosophers. They go further and more boldly than we do. They dig a hundred feet into the soil where we only skim the surface. A French book which astonishes us by its daring seems a timid performance when confronted with what a score of English authors have written on the same subject.' The passages in Voltaire's writings are almost innumerable in which he contrasts the English freedom of thought with the narrowness of the French limits. The English were free to say what they liked; in France the products of the mind were seized upon as contraband goods. While France was in bondage to Descartes, Voltaire was studying Newton in England, and in Locke he found the one metaphysician after his own heart: 'Locke, perhaps the only reasonable metaphysician who has as yet appeared in the world.'

And there was the same difference in politics. Voltaire never concerned himself with anything like abstract political thought, and he paid no special attention to the English political system. But there was very much to strike him. There was no Bastille in England. Voltaire took back with him to France an increased and even more passionate love of political justice and political freedom. He had been twice unjustly imprisoned himself. 'You do not hear in England,' he wrote, 'of *haute, moyenne, et basse justice*.' In France one did hear of these variations.

The outward form and style of English literature naturally made no great impression on Voltaire. To a man of his literary training all English writing before Queen Anne's day would simply stand as a type of literary form which must be avoided. The world of letters with which he came into personal contact in England belonged to a very great extent to the French school, and had nothing to teach Voltaire which he did not already know. He admired the freedom, the daring, of the English writers. But it was not from English literature that Voltaire's style won its exquisite lucidity, its limpid clearness.

If Voltaire had not paid his celebrated visit to Berlin, his biography would have been without some of its most piquant passages. Yet there would not have been much difference in Voltaire himself. But what would Voltaire have been if he had not paid his far less celebrated visit to London? The wittiest of human beings, no doubt; the most famous man of letters of the eighteenth century, very likely; but hardly the Voltaire who embodied in himself and made conspicuous to all the world much of the best and much of the worst that characterised the century in which he lived.



INDEX

Addison, 63, 100, 120, 181, 184, 185, 190; Voltaire on his *Cato*, 191, 216–218; referred to by Voltaire, 197–198, 214, 277, 279, 284, 320, 322
Anson, Admiral, 250
Arouet, François, father of Voltaire, 5
— François Marie. *See* Voltaire
Atterbury, Bishop, 20, 72

Bacon, Voltaire on his *Essays*, 220
Baskerville, John, sends his *Virgil* and *Milton* to Voltaire, 287
Bathurst, Lord, 44
Beattie, Dr., his portrait of Voltaire, 298
Beckford, William, visits Voltaire, 292, 293
Bedford Head Tavern, Voltaire's visits to, 152
Berkeley, Bishop, Voltaire on, 111, 112
Bernières, Madame la Présidente de, 57
Bolingbroke, Lady, 21, 23, 51; writes to Mrs. Howard asking the favour of the Princess of Wales for Voltaire, 65, 235, 237
— Lord, his first friendship with Voltaire, 11; reads Voltaire's first play, 23; visited by Voltaire at La Source, 23–26; his connection with Voltaire's Epic, 27, 28; at Dawley and in Pall Mall, 39; receives Voltaire in England, 20, 39; the *Craftsman* and the *Occasional Writer*, 82, 83, 85; Voltaire's *Brutus* dedicated to, 136; his sneers on Shakespeare, 191; Voltaire, Bolingbroke, and priests, 256; Voltaire on his Works, 321
Boswell, James, 111; visits Voltaire at Ferney, 293-295
Brinsden, John, Voltaire's first English letter to, 50
Broome, Major, with Voltaire at Ferney, 105, 306–307
Burigny, de, on one of Voltaire's literary quarrels, 230
Burney, Charles, his visit to Voltaire, 302–306
Butler, Samuel, Voltaire on his *Hudibras*, 221–222

Camoens, Voltaire on, 120–122
Caroline, Queen, Voltaire's dedication of the *Henriade* to, 150–151
Carteret, Lady, and Swift, 322
— Lord, 153–154
Châteauneuf, Abbé, 3
— Marquis de, 6, 7

Châtelet, Madame du, shields Voltaire from literary criticisms, 158; is taught English by Voltaire at Cirey, 236; squabbles with Voltaire, 236–237; reads English writers, 240; makes Voltaire happy, 242, 243
Chesterfield, Lord, 60; meets Voltaire at Brussels, 266; on Voltaire's Works, 266–267; correspondence with Voltaire, 267–270; Voltaire on, 320
Chetwood, helps Voltaire at Drury Lane Theatre, 48
Choiseul, Duchess de, sends Horace Walpole a letter by Voltaire on Shakespeare, 265
Churchill, Charles, Voltaire's criticism on, 227–228
Clarke, Samuel, Voltaire's intimacy with, 109–110; foolish anecdote respecting Clarke and Voltaire, 111
Clayton, Mrs. *See* Sundon, Lady
Coderc, Voltaire and his publishers, 159–160
Condorcet, on Voltaire's *Lettres Philosophiques*, 144
Conduit, Mrs., Newton's niece, tells Voltaire the anecdote of Newton and the apple, 109
Congreve, Voltaire on, 102; visited by Voltaire, 103
Conti, Prince de, 5
Corneille, 5, 23, 192–193, 258–259, 262, 280, 281, 322
Cowley, Abraham, Voltaire on, 220
Craggs, James, 63
Cumberland, Duke of, 42, 244, 255–256

Dadiky, 158
Deffant, Marquise du, Voltaire on Shakespeare to, 206; on Richardson, 215, 224–225, 273
Denham, Sir John, 120–122
Denis, Madame, Voltaire's niece, 49, 211, 212
Desfontaines, Abbé, 53, 229
Diderot, Voltaire's dispute on Shakespeare with, 211–212
Dodington, Bubb, Voltaire recommended to, by Horatio Walpole, 92; Voltaire's visit to, 93; Voltaire's later correspondence with, 93–95, 97, 98
Dryden, 49, 185, 201; Voltaire on, 223, 293, 305, 322
Dunoyer, Madame, 6
— Olympe, 6, 7
Duvernet, Voltaire's first biographer, 46, 230

Emerson, 36–37
Enclos, Ninon de l', 3, 4

Fabrice, Baron, helps Voltaire with his History of Charles the Twelfth, 145–146
Falkener, Sir Everard, his early friendship with Voltaire in Paris, 43; receives Voltaire at his house at Wandsworth, *id.*; his correspondence with Voltaire, 238–256; *Zaïre* dedicated to him, 44, 214; appointed ambassador to Turkey, 42, 238; Private Secretary to the Duke of Cumberland, 244; Postmaster-General, 43; referred to by Voltaire, 136, 140, 166, 236
Ferguson, Adam, his visit to Voltaire, 310–311
Ferriole, Madame de, 20, 21, 23, 27, 28
Fielding, Voltaire on *Tom Jones*, 225
Fox, Charles James, his youthful visits to Voltaire, 290–292; on Shakespeare, 190
— Henry, 290; letter from Voltaire to, 292
Franklin, Benjamin, 49, 50, 327

Garrick, David: Voltaire, Garrick, and Shakespeare, 208, 209-211, 272-273; letter from, to Voltaire, 271
Garth, Samuel, Voltaire on, 222, 225
Gay, John, 105, 190, 235, 237, 306-307
Genlis, Madame de, 50, 79-80
George I., Voltaire sends him *Œdipe*, 61; Ode by Voltaire to, 61-62; sends a present to Voltaire, 62; death of, 146
George II., subscribes for the *Henriade*, 154; sends Voltaire a present of money, 155
Gibbon, 116; his visits to Voltaire at Ferney, 299-300
Gildon, Charles, on *Hamlet*, 189
Goldsmith, Oliver, his story of Voltaire and Pope, 76; on Voltaire and the Duchess of Marlborough, 104; gives Voltaire's original English of part of *Brutus*, 137-138; his meeting with Voltaire, 295-297; on Voltaire, Reynolds, and Beattie, 298
Gorboduc, Voltaire on, 219
Grafigny, Madame de, 236
Gray, Thomas, his refusal of intercourse with Voltaire, 273-274

Hardinge, George, note from Voltaire to, 287
Hervey, Lady, Voltaire's verses to, 68; 238, 280-281
— Lord, 68, 238
Hobart, Henrietta. *See* Suffolk, Countess of
Howard, Mrs. *See* Suffolk
Hume, David, unable to visit Voltaire, 273; Voltaire on his *History*, 320

Johnson, Dr., 69, 190, 209, 293; on Voltaire's first interview with Pope, 75; on Voltaire's political life in England, 83; on Voltaire, 295; Voltaire on, 294
Jones, Sir William, note from Voltaire to, 309-310

Kames, Lord, his book ridiculed by Voltaire, 226
Keate, George, visits Voltaire at Ferney, 274-275; Voltaire's correspondence with, 275-286
Kinsale, Lord, 307

Lecouvreur, Mademoiselle, 182, 183, 185
Leczinski, Marie, Queen of France, befriends Voltaire, 11
Lee, Nathaniel, 224
Lepell. *See* Hervey, Lady
Locke, Voltaire on, 198, 331
Lowth, Bishop, 226
Lyttelton, Lord, 69; letters of Voltaire to, 99-101, 259-260, 262-263; letter to Voltaire, 261-262

Maine, Duchess of, 9
Mann, Sir Horace, 261
Marlborough, Duchess of, 103-105, 145
— Duke of, 145, 290
Melcombe, Lord. *See* Dodington
Middleton, Dr., 279
Milton, Voltaire on, 95-96, 123-135, 201-225
Montagu, Lady Mary Wortley, 226-227
Moore, John, his interviews with Voltaire, 311-316
Motraye, De la, 146-147

Necker, Voltaire on English literature to, 206
— Madame, letter of Garrick to, 272

Newcastle, Duke of, Voltaire recommended to, 66
Newton, Sir Isaac, his funeral, Voltaire at, 108, 182–183; Voltaire and the story of the apple, 109; Voltaire on, 324; referred to, 181, 184, 185, 198, 236

Oldfield, Mrs., 182–185
Orleans, the Regent, 9–11
Otway, Thomas, Voltaire on, 224, 279

Pascal, 165–166
Patin, Pierre, letter to Garrick on Voltaire and Shakespeare, 209–211
Pennant, Thomas, on Voltaire's English, 50
Peterborough, Lord, Voltaire's visit to, 105, 306; absurd story of Voltaire's relation with, 282–234
Pimpette. *See* Dunoyer, Olympe
Pitt, Andrew, takes Voltaire to a Quakers' meeting, 180
— William, Earl of Chatham, correspondence of Voltaire with, 258–259
Pope, Alexander, Voltaire sends a play to, 27, 71; Voltaire's first interview with, 46, 74–79; letter of Voltaire to, 73; his ignorance of French, 70, 77–78; Voltaire charged with political treachery to, 80–86; his *Homer*, Voltaire on, 120; his *Essay on Man*, Voltaire on, 87–90, 223; Voltaire's admiration of, 72, 73, 86, 87, 237; on Voltaire, 70–71; on Milton and rhyme, 201; referred to, 22, 39, 51, 64, 91, 105, 166–167, 181–182, 190, 225, 228, 236, 238, 249, 277, 279, 293, 305, 306, 322
Prevost, N., Voltaire and his publication of the *Henriade*, 159–161
Price, Uvedale, visits Voltaire with Charles James Fox, 291
Prior, Matthew, Voltaire on, 222, 225; mentioned, 181, 184
Pulteney, William, 238

Queensberry, Duchess of, 235

Rabelais, compared with Swift by Voltaire, 106
Racine, 322
Rainbow Coffee-house, 45
Reynolds, Sir Joshua, 190; how he painted Voltaire, 298–299
Richardson, Samuel, Voltaire on his Novels, 224–225
Robertson, William, Voltaire on his *Charles the Fifth*, 273, 320
Rochester, Earl of, Voltaire on, 221
Rohan, Chevalier de, insults Voltaire, 12–14; challenged by Voltaire, 16; unsuccessful pursuit of, by Voltaire, 40
Roscommon, Earl of, 69 *n.*, 221
Royal Society of London, Voltaire elected member of, 235

Saint-Hyacinthe, his quarrel with Voltaire in London, 230–231
Selwyn, George, 43
Sévigné, Madame de, compared by Voltaire with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, 227
Shakespeare, Voltaire on, 135, 164, 189, 192–214, 217–218, 225, 264–265, 277–281, 284, 308, 319–320, 323–324
Sharpe, Samuel, conversation with Voltaire on Garrick, 272; his visit to Voltaire, 307–309
Sherlock, Martin, his visit to Voltaire, 316–324

Sidney, Algernon, Voltaire on his *Discourses on Government*, 226
Sloane, Sir Hans, Voltaire presents his English Essays to, 114
Spence, Joseph, on Young and Voltaire, 53
Spenser, Edmund, Voltaire on, 220
Stair, Lord, 20; letter of Voltaire to, 62–63
Steele, Richard, 184
Sterne, Laurence, Voltaire on, 225
Suffolk, Countess of, 64
Sulli, Duc de, declines to support Voltaire against insult, 13–14
Sundon, Lady, Voltaire's letter to, 67
Swift, Jonathan, letter of Bolingbroke to, 21–22; Voltaire's friendship with, 105, 107–108; letters of Voltaire to, on the *Henriad*, 152–154; Voltaire on, 106–107; anecdote of, by Voltaire, 322; his ignorance of Chaucer and of Shakespeare, 190; referred to, 46, 64, 115, 181, 225, 267, 277, 305–307

Thieriot, his early friendship with Voltaire, 8; brings Voltaire English books in the Bastille, 17, 45; secures the printing of Voltaire's *Letters Concerning the English Nation* in London, 140; letters of Voltaire to, 41, 140, 164, 235–236
Thomson, James, meets Voltaire, 98; Voltaire on, 99–102, 279, 283–284, 294
Tillotson, Archbishop, 184

Vanbrugh, Sir John, 184, 224
Villette, Madame de. *See* Bolingbroke, Lady
Voltaire, early education, 2–3; a law-student, 4; turns to literature, 4–6; sent to Holland, 6; back to France, 7; in a lawyer's office, 7; at Saint-Ange, 8; exiled from Paris, 9; at the Duke of Sulli's, 9; in the Bastille, 10; his first play, 11; friendship with Bolingbroke, 11, 23–28; prints his Epic secretly, 12; assaulted by Rohan, 12–16; in the Bastille again, 16–17; released and leaves for England, 17; his first impressions of England, 29–35; ill-health, 36–38; returns to Paris in search of Rohan, 40; back to England, 42; retires to Falkener's house at Wandsworth, 43; study of English, 45–55; personal troubles, 56–60; appears at Court, 64; his Court friendships, 66–68; intercourse with Pope, 70–84; political relations with Pope, 80–86; visits the Walpoles, 81–82; acquaintance with Bubb Dodington, 92–98; with Young, 95–98; with Thomson, 98–102; with Swift, 105–108, 152–154; with Samuel Clarke, 109–111; his literary work in England, 113–147, 163–166; his *Henriade*, 148–163; his views on English life and literature, 168–173; on English politics, 173–174; on English social life, 174–178; on English religion, 178–180; on English regard for literature, 181–187; on the English drama and Shakespeare, 188–214; on Milton, 214–216; on Addison, 216–218; on other English writers, 219–228; his lasting interest in English literature, 228; his departure from England, 229–234; in France again, 234; elected Member of the

Royal Society of Literature, 235; reads Pope, Locke, and Newton with the Marquise du Châtelet, 236; English correspondence with Falkener, 238–256; with Pitt, 258–259; with Lyttelton, 259–263; with Horace Walpole, 263–266; with Chesterfield, 267–270; with George Keate, 274–286; with Baskerville, 287; visited by Englishmen: by Charles James Fox, 290–292; by William Beckford, 292; by Boswell, 293–295; by Goldsmith, 295–297; by Gibbon, 299–300; by Wilkes, 300–302; by Charles Burney, 302–306; by William Broome, 306–307; by Samuel Sharpe, 307–309; by Sir William Jones, 309; by Adam Ferguson, 310–311; by John Moore, 311–316; by Martin Sherlock, 316–324

Waller, Edmund, 120, 122; Voltaire on, 220

Walpole, Horace, hears at Eton of Voltaire's visit to Lady Walpole, 81–82; letter to, by Voltaire, on English literature, 198–201 letters by, to Voltaire on Shakespeare, 264–265; sends Voltaire some of his writings, 263 drops correspondence with Voltaire, 265–266; referred to, 43, 261, 321

Walpole, Horatio, writes to the Duke of Newcastle recommending Voltaire, 66; Voltaire's friendship with, 81, 263

Walpole, Sir Robert, 81–83, 263

Warburton, Bishop, Voltaire on his *Legation of Moses*, 279

Wilkes, John, friendship with Madame de Genlis, 79–80; unusual precocity of, *id.*; visits Voltaire at Ferney, 300–302

Woodman, James, and the *Henriade*, 159–160

Wycherley, William, Voltaire on, 223–224

Young, Edward, anecdote of Voltaire and, 53–54; meets Voltaire at Dodington's, 95; defends Milton against Voltaire, 96–97; his conversation, 97; Voltaire on his *Night Thoughts*, 98

PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
LONDON

00020917

Digitized with financial assistance from

HT Parekh FOUNDATION

An Initiative by HDFC

WITH YOU, RIGHT THROUGH

on 28 December, 2018